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

So I'm wondering if you had a chance to listen to my interview, just a couple of episodes back, with Zach First. Zach, the Executive Director of the Drucker Foundation. And in our conversation, we talked about how, in a time of turbulence, organizations and institutions, big and small, can be candles in the darkness. How that means being able to lead to be a manager, when I was talking with Zach, is to be a ball walk, a barrier against tyranny. I mean, that's all good in theory, but how do you start a movement in practice?

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

Welcome to two pages with MBS, the podcast for brilliant people read the best 2 pages from a favorite book. A book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Thibault Manekin is a commercial real estate entrepreneur. Not my usual type of guest, but he's a real estate guy with a twist and it's been a



winding road to get from where he started, to where he is now, even though in some ways he's come back home.

MBS ([01:11](#)):

So let's start with Thibault's roots. He was born to a French immigrant and her American husband. He grew up in Baltimore city with three younger sisters. Quite frankly, it was a bit of an idyllic life growing up and Thibault could easily have disappeared into the ranks of the upper middle class and frankly, the American dream. But there were two powerful moments when he was younger, that opened up a different path for Thibault; one dark, one light.

MBS ([01:38](#)):

The first is when his parents allowed him to stay up late and watch a movie with him. Now, that'd been something like, I don't know the Incredibles. Well, that would've been fun. But no, the movie wasn't the Incredibles, it was *Mississippi Burning*.

Thibault ([01:52](#)):

It was really heavy for a 10 year old boy. There's this scene about halfway through where a mob of the Ku Klux Klan is gathered outside of a black church and they're kind of waiting, hiding behind trees and the black parishioners come out after the service and the mob attacks them and peets them. Towards the end of that scene, there's this young boy who appears to be my age and he's kneeling on the ground, just praying for this all to end, and a Ku Klux Klan man and comes and kicks him as hard as he can in the head. At 10 years old, that's all I could take.

Thibault ([02:19](#)):

I sprint out of the room, I run up to my bedroom and I bury my head in my pillow, sobbing uncontrollably. I remember like my mom comes in and she sits on the end of the bed and she doesn't say anything. She puts her hand on my



back. She just kind of holds space. Michael, its the first time I remember asking myself, why are we so divided as human beings? How can I have just witnessed this scene from this movie, which is based on a true story, and how is this possible?

MBS ([02:46](#)):

That's the dark moment, but Thibault's parents had another powerful moment in store for him. This one's the light moment. A few months later after the movie, they loaded everyone into the family station wagon and they went for a drive.

Thibault ([03:00](#)):

We pull over to the side of the road and there are hundreds of cars parked there and thousands of people on the road. They're all kind of linked hands. My dad explains that we're there to participate in something called Hands Across America, which was an attempt to get Americans to link hands from the east coast all the way to the west coast. And so we joined hands with literally millions of people from as far as I could see, the right and left is this human chain. I remember asking myself in that moment, what is this powerful force that has brought so many people together for one specific cause at one moment in time? And I began to ask myself a second question, which is, "What are the creative ways that we can begin to bridge the divides that exist?" So, 10 years old, I had these two questions. Why are we so divided? And what are the creative ways that we can bridge those divides?

MBS ([03:50](#)):

Now I imagine, I mean, I'm certain actually that all of us bump into questions like this over the course of our lives, especially when we're young, when we start to notice the injustices of the world. But, as we get older, most of us find a way to live with the discomfort, just to accept the way things are, to turn a blind eye. I wanted to know what kept those powerful moments, these questions that



were raised, what kept these alive for Thibault, and how did they launch him on his unexpected journey?

Thibault ([04:23](#)):

The questions never went away, right. They started burning in my heart at 10 years old and they only intensified. As I said, I grew up in Baltimore city and I continued to see real examples of that divide. And I grew up in a, kind of, upper middle class bubble. And I was never comfortable in that bubble, because I had seen the other side of it, right. I was always drawn to it. I had this incredible compassion around it and had always tried to wrap my head around it and my heart around it. So, the older I got, the more I saw real world examples of why those questions were really important. I finally, I kind of graduate from college and we have two choices in life. We can sit on the sideline and hope that someone else does the heavy lifting-

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

Yeah.

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

... or, we can understand that we have a real role and purpose in this world. I had begun to understand my purpose, which was those answers to those two questions. So I set off and with two friends. Started in international non-profit called PeacePlayers. And the idea is that we would go to war torn countries and we would use sports in our case, basketball, to bridge divides, develop leaders and help to change perceptions. Yeah. So we raised a bunch of money for \$8,000, which felt like a million dollars, like 22 years old. It was enough to get on a plane to South Africa, right after the fall of apartheid. We started dribbling basketballs in black townships and black rural areas and white suburbs.



Thibault ([05:49](#)):

Slowly but surely, this concept started to pick up, the kids were coming out of the woodwork to participate. Coaches were really falling in love with it and the program began to grow. I guess about, I don't know, three or six months into it, we were starting to run out of money. We were doing the best we could to raise it. We get a call from Nelson Mandela's Foundation, right. The phone call-

MBS ([06:08](#)):

I've heard of him.

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

The lady on the other line says the president Mandela is a huge believer in the power of sports to unite and he loves your program, and he wants to become your largest sponsor.

MBS ([06:19](#)):

Wow.

Thibault ([06:19](#)):

So we go from no credibility to hustling as hard as we can, to Nelson Mandela's name and money behind us. The floodgates kind of open. We were invited to replicate the model all over the world in the middle east with Israelian-Palestinians, Northern Ireland-Protestant Catholics, Cyprus-Yemen. Today, the program's in over 20 countries has worked with hundreds of thousands of kids.

MBS ([06:42](#)):

Yeah.



Thibault ([06:43](#)):

From that very young age, all the way through into my twenties, I began to fulfill that desire, to understand those two questions and to help to answer them.

MBS ([06:56](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([06:56](#)):

There're two impossible questions to answer, but at least I felt like I was a part of trying to figure it out.

MBS ([07:03](#)):

Thibault, I was speaking to somebody else on the podcast just the other day. He runs an organization called the Barnraisers, something. We had a very interesting conversation about, when you feel the world is broken, where do you put your attention? We talked about the, kind of, the classic white savior phenomena. It is like, "Okay, you got you people over there are broken. Let me come in, fix it and save you from yourselves." I'm wondering how you sit with that?

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

Yeah. I've asked myself that a lot. Especially, as I was writing the book that I just released, it could have been a prominent through line. And I think the difference is right, and the way that we've approached or that I've approached the opportunity for this work, is to understand that it isn't my work. It isn't my idea?

MBS ([08:01](#)):

Yeah.



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

I believe that in order to grow an idea, we have to understand that it doesn't belong to us. That it's always existed. It's been sitting on the tip of the universe as tongue waiting to be brought to life.

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

Oh, I love that. Yeah.

Thibault ([08:15](#)):

We will play some small role in bringing it to life, but it will only succeed if tens or hundreds or thousands or millions of people, claim ownership of the idea.

MBS ([08:25](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([08:25](#)):

And feel the same sense of pride of ownership and authorship in what's getting created. So when we went to South Africa for the first time as two white men, we were really clear that this wasn't our idea of using sports to unite, that it always had existed. That we had no cultural ability to understand the divisions that existed in South Africa.

MBS ([08:43](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Thibault ([08:44](#)):

I knew how to dribble a basketball and to a certain extent at 22 years old, that was about it, right.

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

Right, right.



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

So our jobs was to be quietly behind the scenes-

MBS ([08:53](#)):

Yes.

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

... helping the people from South Africa pick up the game of basketball and use it and mold it in a way that they thought would change the fabric of it. My role in all of the programs and all of the ideas that we've helped to grow, has been to be behind the scenes.

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

Yeah.

Thibault ([09:11](#)):

So that it isn't as the white savior coming in saying, "Hey, I've noticed by reading the news that 10,000 miles away from my city of Baltimore, you guys don't like each other."

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

Right. Right.

Thibault ([09:20](#)):

"That you've got centuries of division and hatred that have been bubbling up and I'm going to fix it." My ability to come in deeply, listen, bring whatever expertise I have, but really be behind the scenes is, I think, the difference between the white savior mentality and me feeling like I'm playing my part in search of my purpose.



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

Yeah. I mean, over the years, as you've been involved in different movements, how has your sense of leadership changed and evolved?

Thibault ([10:00](#)):

It's changed a lot. Leadership's such a fascinating word. You kind of think of the leader as the thumping his chest and out in the front line and putting at point everybody in the directions and real clarity. I've always been really self-conscious about that right, because I never thought that I had the ability to truly lead.

MBS ([10:20](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([10:21](#)):

My approach has always been a lot more hands off, a lot more, "I love you. I see you. I trust you."

MBS ([10:28](#)):

Right.

Thibault ([10:29](#)):

"I'm here to support," and I just never knew if that would work. That wasn't the stereotypical leadership role. It was just honestly, really self-conscious about that. I think my ability as a leader in what I've learned is that, that approach actually works really well. But there are times where we have to be able to step up, where our face is required to be in the spotlight, where our messages needs to be in part of the interview or the newspaper story.

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

Yeah. Yeah.



Thibault ([10:59](#)):

For years, I had made sure that anytime anybody approached us to interview me or us about the work that we were doing, I would always pass the interview opportunity off to somebody else, right. I never wanted to be in the spotlight. And what I've learned is that there are times, seldom and few, where your message is really important. That the people that you are leading, need to hear from you in a different way.

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

Yeah.

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

Again, while rare if you're growing these movements and these ideas in a really inclusive way yeah. There are times you're going to have to step up and make a really hard decision.

MBS ([11:31](#)):

Sure.

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

And I think, it's been a beautiful part of the journey, is understanding where I've missed that mark on that, and understanding how to correct it.

MBS ([11:46](#)):

Who planted the seed of a leadership style of, "I love you. I see you. I support you." Where, where did that come from?

Thibault ([11:55](#)):

I think it came from my parents. It's interesting. I have two kids now, so I'm on the other side of that. Parenting's really hard, while they'll tell you-



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

I'm child free, but I've heard that. And I admire you for raising kids.

Thibault ([12:12](#)):

Yeah. I mean, hard and beautiful at the same time. My parents never once told us what to do, who to be, or how to live our lives. When we messed up, there was never like a sit-down lecture of like, "This is how I am as a parent and a human and this is how you should be, you should follow and you should be everything that I tell you to be." They gave us really long leashes. They allowed us to... I fell out of so many trees. I was in the hospital so much that the nurses would send me birthday cards until I was like 10 years old, because my parents let me live life, right.

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

Right.

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

They never lectured to us. I made so many mistakes along the way, Michael. To the point that as I've reflected back, I've gone back to them and say, "Why weren't you guys more present for me? Why didn't you tighten that leash? Why didn't you explain things to me?" What I realized is, that way of leading of telling people how to be, is the immediate quick fix.

MBS ([13:15](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([13:15](#)):

But it doesn't solve it for the long term, because it isn't ingrained in your heart. It sticks in your head, but it isn't in your heart. This way of leading by example. My dad and my mom are incredible human beings. What I've learned now as an adult is that just by watching them be who they were as they went through life,



shaped who I became, shaped the leadership style that I had way more than anybody ever kind of lecturing to me. It's a dance because now I have kids and the easiest thing to do is yell and scream. And, "What the hell? Why did you do that?" And like, "Don't you know that's not how we are as humans?"

MBS ([13:51](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([13:52](#)):

I always catch myself and say, "Hey, just be."

MBS ([13:55](#)):

Thibault, what book have you selected to read from?

Thibault ([14:01](#)):

Yes, Michael, I selected the book *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.

MBS ([14:05](#)):

Is quite the book. I was checking in on it. I've read it many years ago. It's 70,000 ratings on Amazon, which is approximately 69,990 more ratings than my books have, which is like a lot. It's been this huge seller. How did it come into your life? How did you discover it?

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

The first time... And I've read this book 50 times. Any time I set out on any kind of adventure, it's the book that I read, and you can read it in a couple hours.

MBS ([14:39](#)):

Yeah.



Thibault ([14:41](#)):

The first time that I set out for my first adventure away from my family, my mom gave me the book. She didn't say anything. Just gave me the book and I think I must have read it on the plane ride and it changed my life. The book defined me and can talk a little bit more about that in the future, but in part of the conversation, but it's an incredible story.

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

Well, knowing how important this is to you, how did you select the two pages to read?

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

So I actually went back and read it two nights ago to remind myself, because I have a copy here. I mean, look how old this copy is.

MBS ([15:17](#)):

Yeah. I see that.

Thibault ([15:17](#)):

You can barely see it. It's got so many marks and highlights in it. I went back and reread it and every time that I've read it, it has had a different meaning at a different point in my life. What's interesting is the passage that I've chosen to read, which really talks about following the heart, is something that I had forgotten over the course of the last couple years through the pandemic.

MBS ([15:40](#)):

Yes.



Thibault ([15:40](#)):

This was such a beautiful reminder. I had began to remind myself of this. It's one of my, kind of, commitments into 2022, is to always trust my heart. My heart is never wrong. As much as my brain tries to get in the way of it-

MBS ([15:56](#)):

Right, right.

Thibault ([15:57](#)):

... when I really trust and follow my heart, I make all of the right decisions.

MBS ([16:00](#)):

That's wonderful. I'm excited to hear the two pages so, Thibault, over to you.

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

They crossed the desert for another two days in silence. The alchemist had become much more cautious because they were approaching the area where the most violent battles were being waged. As they moved along, the boy tried to listen to his heart.

Thibault ([16:22](#)):

It was not easy to do; in earlier times, his heart had always been ready to tell its story, but lately that wasn't true. There had been times when his heart spent hours telling of its sadness, and at other times it became so emotional over the desert sunrise that the boy had to hide his tears. His heart beat faster when it spoke to the boy of treasure, and more slowly, when the boy stared entranced at the endless horizons of the desert. But his heart was never quiet, even when the boy and the alchemist had fallen into silence. "Why do we have to listen to our hearts?" the boy asked when they had made camp that day. "Because wherever your heart is, that is where you'll find your treasure."



Thibault ([16:56](#)):

"But my heart is agitated," the boy said. "It has dreams. It gets emotional. It becomes passion over a woman of the desert. Asks things of me. And it keeps me from sleeping many nights and I'm thinking about her."

Thibault ([17:07](#)):

"Well, that's good. Your heart is alive. Keep listening to what it has to say." During the next three days, the two travelers passed by a number of armed tribesmen, and saw others on the horizon. The boy's heart began to speak of fear, told him stories it had heard from the Soul of the World, stories of men who sought to find their treasures and never succeeded. Sometimes it frightened the boy with the idea that he might not find his treasure, or that he might die there in the desert. At other times, it told the boy that it was satisfied; it found love and riches.

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

"My heart is a traitor," The boy said to the alchemist when they had paused to rest the horses. "It doesn't want me to go on."

Thibault ([17:42](#)):

"That makes sense," the Alchemist answered. "Naturally it's afraid that, in pursuing your dream, you might lose everything you've won. "Well then, why should I listen to my heart?" "Because you will never again be able to keep it quiet. Even if you pretend not to have heard it what it tells you, it'll always be there inside you, repeating to you what you're thinking about life and about the world." "You mean I should listen, even if it's treasonous?" "Treason is a blow that comes unexpectedly. If you know your heart well, it will never be able to do that to you. Because you'll know its dreams and wishes, and you'll know how to deal with them."



Thibault ([18:15](#)):

"You will never be able to escape from your heart. So it's better to listen to what it has to say. That way, you'll never have to fear an unanticipated blow." The boy continued to listen to his heart. As they crossed the desert, he came to understand its dodges and tricks, and to accept it as it was. He lost his fear, he forgot about his need to go back to the oasis, because, one afternoon, his heart told him that it was happy. "Even though I complained sometimes," it said "it's because I'm the heart of a person, and people's hearts are that way." People are afraid to pursue their most important dreams, because they feel that they don't deserve them, or that they'll be unable to achieve them. We, their hearts, become fearful just thinking of loved ones who go away forever, or of moments that could have been good but weren't, or of treasure that might have been found but were forever hidden in the sands. Because, when these things happen, we suffer terribly."

Thibault ([19:01](#)):

"My heart is afraid that it will have to suffer," the boy told the alchemist one night as they looked up at the moonless sky. "Tell your heart that the fear of suffering is worse than suffering itself. And that no heart has ever suffered when it goes in search of its dreams."

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

Thank you. How does that passion speak to your heart?

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

Look, I think I have to tell a beautiful story, right. Again, the whole book, The Alchemist, is my life, right. He starts in a little bit of his comfort zone is a shepherd in the hills of Andalusia, Spain and gets the signs and meets the king that he must travel, right. He sets off for Africa, which is what I did.



MBS ([19:52](#)):

Yeah.

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

At 21 years old, I left my bubble, my comfort zone and I set off for Africa and there's this powerful energy on the continent of Africa. This constant drumbeat that grows within your heart every day you're there and it never leaves you. The boy has this winding road and he's kind of always in search of his purpose and of the woman of his dreams right, and of the treasure. I've spent my whole life doing that. Searching it for the woman of the desert and the woman that is going to like fulfill my every step. So every time I would meet a woman or girl or start dating, I'd give them a copy of the book, the Alchemist.

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

Right.

Thibault ([20:33](#)):

It was amazing because none of them liked it, because there's this, I don't know if you remember it, but about three quarters of the way into the book, the boy meets the woman of the desert, the most beautiful soulful fulfilling partner that he will ever find in his life. But he leaves her. He sets out because his destiny is to pursue his purpose and to find his treasure and he gets all the right lessons along the way.

Thibault ([21:00](#)):

And I met this amazing woman from Brazil and I gave her the book and Paula Coelho's from Brazil.

MBS ([21:05](#)):

Yeah.



Thibault ([21:05](#)):

I gave her a copy of the book to read and the reason that the previous girlfriends didn't like the book is, because they always thought that they were the woman of the desert in the book and I was the boy, right. My wife today, who I met in Brazil, read the book and loved it, because she saw herself as the boy. She was the dreamer, the one always in search of her purpose and her destiny who would never settle for anything, because it would only get in the way of that. The people that like the book and understand it, see themselves as the boy.

MBS ([21:37](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Thibault ([21:38](#)):

The people who don't relate to the book, see themselves as one of the other characters and oftentimes the woman who ends up waiting. So this book means so much to me on so many different levels.

MBS ([21:48](#)):

I feel it. Yeah.

Thibault ([21:50](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([21:51](#)):

I feel it.

Thibault ([21:51](#)):

Yeah.



MBS ([21:51](#)):

Thibault, there's an interesting tension for me about you selecting this book, because it feels to me that *The Alchemist* is very much a kind of heroes journey style book. You're heading off and you're on a journey and you're discovering treasure. Looking for the external treasure, finding the lessons and the treasure within, and your book is called *Larger Than Yourself*. It feels to be about, it's more than a heroes journey. It's about a collectiveness and a movement and in fact, a need to get beyond just your own desires. How do those two pieces of wisdom sit together for you?

Thibault ([22:35](#)):

Michael, that is a beautiful and a hard question to answer so, well done. Look, it goes back to your original question of leadership, right. What I have always been afraid to face is any acknowledgement that I was part of creating greatness. Even in the smallest capacity, right. And so, the book that I wrote *larger than yourself* was really hard, because I have never been really good at being vulnerable. I've always been very reserved. I've never liked the spotlight or the limelight. As I've told you, I've always been behind the scenes.

MBS ([23:19](#)):

Right.

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

My first pass at it, I gave it to my friend, Wes Moore, who wrote the-

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

Introduction. Yeah.

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

... introduction and some incredible bestsellers. And he was like, "T, you missed the mark. This book will change the world, but nobody's going to want to read it



if you can't be more vulnerable and you can't explore a deeper level of understanding of where you yourself fit into this picture." I think we've all got that hero's journey within us. I certainly do and I've suppressed it for too long.

MBS ([23:52](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([23:53](#)):

Look, I believe that everybody who participates in the growth of an idea has a heroic role to plan it. While I acknowledge that, I have to also acknowledge my heroic work in all of this and all of this and you're right, I hadn't linked the two together.

MBS ([24:10](#)):

Yeah.

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

Probably some psychology that I need to dig further into, so thank you for making me [inaudible 00:24:15].

MBS ([24:15](#)):

Just lie down on this couch that I have prepared for you and we should have some fun. How do you see ambition for yourself now? What are you ambitious for?

Thibault ([24:32](#)):

I'm at this incredible place in my life right now, right. I guess I'm 44 maybe almost halfway through it. I have such clarity in why I wake up every morning, right. I completely trust the universe in the opportunities that it brings my way. As we talked about it, maybe a reason that I chose this passage, I am in full surrender of my heart today.



MBS ([25:04](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Thibault ([25:06](#)):

I put that aside during the pandemic, as I had mentioned, because I was so afraid. I didn't know what the future was going to look like. Well, I wasn't afraid of dying, but the work that I do today is in commercial real estate with a soul and a twist that we can get into. But I had no idea. Would anybody ever go back to an office building that we were building? Would anybody live in an apartment again? Would anybody shop in and visit a store other than shopping online, ever again?

Thibault ([25:33](#)):

So there was this real fear that it set in and I let that fear get in the way of my ability to be creative.

MBS ([25:40](#)):

Right.

Thibault ([25:41](#)):

And I let my head dictate the decisions as opposed to listening to my heart. Now that I'm in kind of complete surrender of it, it's a beautiful space. I'm able to kind of live in the present moment. I'm blessed with the opportunities that come my way. Look, the most ambitious thing and the greatest thing that I will ever be a part of is to be the husband to Lola, and to be the father of Finley and Durban. It doesn't matter how many buildings I build, how many nonprofits I start, how many ideas I helped to bring to life. It is about those two little boys and what impact they are going to have on the world. For me, that's the greatest honor and just like in work and business and life, I messed that one up almost every day too, but it's yeah, been a beautiful journey.



MBS ([26:37](#)):

That phrase 'surrender to your heart' is a resonant one. I don't know how to do that though. It's the sort of thing you read in *The Alchemist*, "and the boy surrendered to his heart and he found the treasure," and I'm like, yeah. What does it take to surrender to your heart? How do you learn how to do that? Or, how do you... Maybe it's not even a learning thing. Maybe it's a-

Thibault ([27:05](#)):

I think you do. I think you know, right. I think we all know. Anytime we're faced with the decision, which is almost every moment of every day, there are two things that come into play. One is our heart, right. And one is our head. What I am increasingly aware of is that conversation.

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

Right.

Thibault ([27:24](#)):

Now I'm able to step outside of that and hear what my head's saying. Also, hear the different perspective of my heart. The heart is the thing that's going to scare us. Right. It's the thing, the decision that our heart wants to make, is the one that's the most uncomfortable. It's the one that brings fear and fear needs to be this incredible motivator, right. When we start to be afraid of something, it means that it's uncomfortable and it's outside of our bubble and it's different, than what we are used to. But fear is the only place and outside of that bubble and that comfort zone, or the only places where true growth happens.

MBS ([28:01](#)):

Right.



Thibault ([28:02](#)):

The heart always knows that and is going to always point us in that direction. And it's like, so when my heart starts to get involved, I'll start sweating a little bit. Not for like decisions of whether it should turn left or right, but true decisions that are going to affect a lot of people. When my head and my heart aren't align, I start sweating a little bit and I try to follow my... I know that I try to follow what my head's trying to get me to do, but the ability to really dive into that heart is going to be uncomfortable. We need to be aware of that as the conversation start.

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

That feels more accessible to me on an individual level. Like, who am I and how am I showing up in the world? It feels less accessible at a organizational level. So, you're in the world of commercial real estate with a twist, as you said. I don't know anything about the world of commercial real estate, but I imagine it involves strategy, and strategy is often framed as clearheaded thinking. What am I going to say yes to? What are we going to say no to? I'm wondering how you work with head and heart in the context of being part of an organization?

Thibault ([29:26](#)):

So look right, you are referring to how the world has thought of real estate forever; strategy, make money plan, out-think.

MBS ([29:35](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([29:35](#)):

Right? The problem with real estate is that it's the most powerful, connected industry on the planet. But historically it's done more to divide us and keep us apart than bring us together. I believe that we have responsibility to reimagine industries that the world is known as one way. Flip them upside down, where



we're leading with our purpose over our profit, right. What if real estate and buildings could actually be used to empower communities, unite cities, and help to launch really powerful ideas? It's the question that we ask ourselves every single day. The difference between the strategy that you're talking about and how to grow this heartfelt movement on a large collective level, is removing the word strategy and replacing it with the word listening.

MBS ([30:22](#)):

Right.

Thibault ([30:24](#)):

What if we could go into communities and instead of telling them what we're going to build for them, spend time deeply listening to them, understanding what it is that they need buildings to do within their communities, so that they can live better lives. Right. And I think it's the replacement of that. Look, their strategy is really important and we strategize all the time and we brainstorm and we think, but at the heart of that strategy, the direction of it is informed by the people that we are going to serve.

MBS ([30:55](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([30:55](#)):

And I think when you're able to do it in that way, you're able to kind of bring everybody together through a higher purpose. Right. It isn't about extracting as much money from a community or a project as possible. It's, how can this project change? The narrative, change the dynamics. Yeah.

MBS ([31:16](#)):

How did you decide to leave Peace Players behind, which, as you said, taken off in countries around the world, blessed by Nelson Mandela Foundation and



[inaudible 00:31:30] by that, and feels like that could have ended up being something that you do for the rest of your life in one form or another, but to move onto the next project. How did you know what to say no to and what was it about this new project that called you?

Thibault ([31:53](#)):

So it was a really hard decision, because at PeacePlayers, I had fulfilled every one of my wildest dreams. I traveled around the world, got paid to do it. I had a backpack and a surfboard that I went from country to country. Got to meet the most incredible people and it was a really hard decision, but my life didn't feel real after five years of living out of a suitcase and bouncing from community to community. I wanted to pick a city and settle down in it and put everything I had into that one city.

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

Right.

Thibault ([32:32](#)):

And I didn't know what city that was going to be and I had unexpectedly ended up back in my hometown of Baltimore, 2006. I remember I was crashing out of my parents' house that night and had a beautiful dinner prepared by my mom. I went to go to sleep in the bed that I slept in thousands of times. I'm kind of lying there, incapable of closing my eyes or something that was nagging me. Something that was really deeply [inaudible 00:32:58].

MBS ([32:57](#)):

It's that french cooking. It always keeps you awake. There's too much butter.

Thibault ([33:02](#)):

That might've been in it.



Thibault ([33:04](#)):

But for me in the moment, there was something that was bothering me.

MBS ([33:07](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([33:07](#)):

So I tossed and turned the whole night and I couldn't figure out what it was. Eventually the sun comes up and I'm know I'm not going to sleep. I grab the keys in my car and I'm furious and frustrated and sad and emotionally drained. What am I doing back here? I get in my car and I drive and I go into West Baltimore and I pull over at the intersection of Pennsylvania and North Avenue. This is a part of Baltimore that I'd never been to before that I had been made to believe my entire life, that I wasn't welcome in and I wouldn't be safe in. This is the intersection where I pulled over that nine years later would be the epicenter of the Freddie Gray uprising in 2015 that the world watched our city go through one of its many struggles.

Thibault ([33:54](#)):

And I had this moment there, Michael, where I knew that I needed to get out of my car and I needed to explore this community. I knew that there was something about this narrative that had been ingrained in me, that wasn't true. I understood for my experience of living in all these other really complicated cities around the world, that until we can walk into the shoes of others, until we can deeply listen, we're not able to pass judgment, right. And we should never pass judgment. So I get out of my car and I start walking around and it was on that walk that I had these two realizations, right.

Thibault ([34:26](#)):

That, one, our country of America's more divided than these other so-called war torn countries. We have an inability to have open and honest conversations



with people who don't look and feel like us and that, that was a ticking time bomb.

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

Yeah.

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

We've certainly seen the results of the not being able to communicate here in this country. And then the second, was the realization about real estate and in that moment, wanted to do something about it, and it had been a huge believer in the importance of re imagining industries. We had re imagined basketball, not about how many shots you could make or how much money you could get playing professional ball, but how a round ball traveling between two kids could actually change perceptions and bridge divides.

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

I wanted to do that with real estate. I wanted to take a shot at it. And it was that experience on that street that day, that made me realize how much I had missed my whole life. I grew up less than three miles from that spot. Had never been there and had never taken the time to listen and I wanted to do something about that.

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

I mean, we're talking in 2022, America doesn't feel like it's become more United and just started this work. In Canada, we looked down in America and I personally feel a bit nervous about it all, but it's not like Canada's not got its cracks and fissures, as well. We've just had a truckers blockade and all sorts of hoo-ha coming up here as well. Do you become disheartened by what you see in America? I mean, it's kind of coming back to the heart again, but it's like, I don't want to ask, are you optimistic or pessimistic. I guess, how do you stay on the path when some of the stories you read and hear feel, dispiriting?



Thibault ([36:15](#)):

I am so afraid. I am so afraid of the power of human beings and our inability to use it for good. Yeah. I'm afraid for my kids. I'm afraid for the impact that technology is going to have on their ability to do what you and I are doing right now.

MBS ([36:38](#)):

Right.

Thibault ([36:42](#)):

I am comforted by the fact that this is the fear that I've known throughout my life that inspires me to ask deeper questions, to love harder, to follow my heart in a more true way. While I know that my tiny little immaterial platform won't change everything at once, perhaps it'll show my kids the way. Perhaps it'll show a few others the way and I let that fear and that sadness propel me forward and make sure that I'm not sitting on the sidelines, reading about somebody else, doing the heavy lifting.

MBS ([37:31](#)):

Right.

Thibault ([37:32](#)):

That I actually feel like I'm a part of the lift myself.

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

Thanks for the conversation, Thibault. I love talking to you. As a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said, in this conversation?

Thibault ([37:47](#)):

Look, to a certain extent, I feel so complete. I will tell a story.



MBS ([37:56](#)):

Great.

Thibault ([37:56](#)):

If I have time, that really changed my life and you hinted at it when you asked me how I transitioned from PeacePlayers to the next thing that I'm doing. I was on the flight back to South Africa, when I knew that I wasn't going back to the program. Flying back to Baltimore, and I kind of settled into my window seat on this monster jumbo 747 plane. I was broken. I didn't know what was going to be next. I was leaving the thing. I loved the most in the world. I hadn't found the woman of the desert, even though I looked around every corner. I didn't know what I was going back to, and I was drained.

Thibault ([38:42](#)):

I passed out before the plane even took off. And I don't know, a few hours in there's some turbulence, I end up waking up. Look, I mean, I think you've gotten a sense of me. I love to talk to people. I love to meet people. So you sit down on a 16 hour flight next to me, you better be prepared to go. There's this 12 year old kid sitting down next to me. And he's reading this big fat book, right, bigger book than I've ever read. And so he sees me kind of come too and I introduce myself as Thibault and he closes the book as if he's ready to talk and introduces himself as Simon. We start this awesome conversation about what he's doing in South Africa and one of my favorite questions to ask people is, if I had a time capsule, a time machine, and I could use it to send those people back to any time period in the world, what time period would they go back to?

Thibault ([39:30](#)):

I've heard the coolest answers. People want to go back to the medieval ages. People want to go back to being caveman. They want to go back to the sixties. And so I find my window to sneak the question in with Simon and, Michael, as if he knew I was going to ask him that question. He says, "I would use your time



capsule to go back to the time period of Nazi, Germany." I kind of froze, right. I had that sweating sensation when fear enters my body. And I asked him to repeat himself. I was positive I misunderstood. And he says, "Yeah, if I could have used your time machine, I would've gone used it to go back to the time period of Nazi Germany, because I would've had a chance to stop Adolf Hitler."

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

It was this amazing moment, because I've asked myself my whole life. You talked about white savior, right? I've asked myself my whole life, had I been born during the time of slavery in America, in a white family in the deep south-

MBS ([40:22](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([40:23](#)):

... would I have had the mental strength in fortitude-

MBS ([40:26](#)):

Right, the moral courage.

Thibault ([40:27](#)):

... to... The moral courage to stand up for what was right, even though nobody else in my family did? Right.

MBS ([40:31](#)):

Even to have noticed that what was wrong, yeah.

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

To have noticed. Yep.



MBS ([40:35](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([40:35](#)):

Same question. Now I'd spent so much time living post apartheid, South Africa. If I'd grown up as a white boy during apartheid would I have had that mental fortitude, that compassion, that'd be ability to see the other side?

MBS ([40:46](#)):

Yeah.

Thibault ([40:47](#)):

I'd always shrug that question off, because my dad always said, there's no such thing as a 'what if' question, because it's not possible and there's not ever going to be a time machine, so why am I bothering myself with these silly questions? In that moment, Simon changed my life forever because he made me realize that, 50 years from today, there's going to be two people on a plane and one, person's going to turn to the other one and ask that same stupid question, the time capsule question. And that person's going to turn around and say, "I'd go back to 2022, because I could have had a chance to stop the global warming, the injustice in school system. Been a part of the black lives matter movement. Whatever the struggle or the opportunity I could have done it."

Thibault ([41:29](#)):

It made me realize the importance of the immediacy of life. That we have one shot at this. And again, are we going to sit around and hope that somebody else does the work or are we going to do it ourselves?

MBS ([41:40](#)):

Yeah.



Thibault ([41:41](#)):

I vowed in that moment to never let a day go by where I wasn't a part of the solution, where I wasn't scaring myself enough to feel like I was making some sort of a difference, even if it was in a tiny way. And it was an incredible moment. Then it was an incredible life lesson. I don't even know where Simon is today. I don't know how old he might be, but that little 12 year old boy and the simplicity and the courage of his statement, to go against the trend was such a beautiful life learning moment for me.

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

Surrender to your heart, surrender to your heart. Now that's a challenge, isn't it? I mean, I struggle with that. I'm not even sure what that means sometimes, but I suspect that to surrender to your heart, you have to know how to listen to it and to really listen to it. I mean, I'm, I can easily convince myself that my heart saying eat another size of cake, but I know that's not the real message here. So, how do you hear the deeper call? How do you understand what the call to surrender might be? Well, perhaps you can only really see and hear what your heart is pointing to, when you walk out into community. And I'm thinking Thibault, standing in the intersection in West Baltimore, or Thibault chatting to Simon on that flight home and in those conversations, that's when you start to hear what your heart might be saying to you. Because, perhaps your heart never speaks to you directly, but it communicates in the echoes and the whispers that bounce back from the world.

MBS ([43:22](#)):

I thought this was an inspiring conversation. A call to action and a person who has found purpose and is finding ways to live his purpose in the world. If you like conversations like this, there's two that might tickle your fancy in the back catalog, now that we have over a hundred interviews there. Peter Bregman, a good friend of mine, a writer, a thinker. And we talked about, and around the topic of his book, which is on empathy, his most recent book. So that topic, that



interview is called a Guide To Empathy. And Sarah Hendren, How To See The World In You, is the name of the episode. Sarah is a designer and she designs for people who... I'm not sure what the right language is now, but who have a disability of some sort who might call themselves disabled. How do you design to meet everyone's needs? Not just able bodied people and that full sense of the word that, for instance, I might embody.

MBS ([44:24](#)):

So another great conversation, very thoughtful, very brilliant woman, I thought. If you want more of Thibault, well then he has a website. He has a book out as well. Thibault Manekin is his website. I spell it, because it's a slightly complicated name. His name is T-H-I-B-A-U-L-T, M-A-N-E-K-I-N. Thibaultmanekin.com.

MBS ([44:50](#)):

Brilliant. Thank you for listening. Thank you for passing the episode along to that one person who needs to hear this episode. Thanks for giving it some love on the internets and the reviews, wherever you're doing it. And I'll remind you that you are awesome and you're doing great.