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

If you've read my new book, How To Begin and I mean, come on, how could you not have read my new book, How To Begin? If not, I can wait, stop and go and read it and then come back to this interview. I'm kidding, of course. But if you have read it anyway, you'll know that I track my own evolution as I define and commit to a worthy goal. In fact, two worthy goals, there's two stories that unfold as the book is read. One is from my recent past and it's about me attempting to graciously give up control of being the CEO at Box of Crayons, the training company that I founded. Just what it took for me to figure out what the real challenge was there for me and how I tried to deliver on that as one of my worthy goals, something thrilling and important and daunting.



MBS ([00:50](#)):

The other story that's in the book is one that we're right in the middle of right here, right now. It is about my ambitions for this very podcast, 2 Pages with MBS. I've been thinking for a while what success means and directly related or tied in with that is how do you even measure success? Now in the book, I hone in on one metric; 10,000 downloads for an episode, which would make the podcast a top 3% podcast. In case you're interested, for our most popular episodes we're closing in on 2000 downloads per episode. So slowly but surely I'm getting there. But here's the thing, perhaps I've been thinking about this metric all wrong.

MBS ([01:39](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, book that has shaped them. Welcome in particular, if you are a new listener, we've got a bunch of new people coming in and listening to the podcast, so welcome. I'm truly delighted that you're here.

MBS ([01:58](#)):

Now, Jay Acunzo is also a podcaster like me, and he's one who I look up to because he has challenged the way I think about making, about creating and also about success. His core podcast is called Unthinkable and it's billed as the American life for creative work. But for many years he hosted another one called Three Clips where he all got very meta and analyzed three clips from other podcasts and talked about why they worked. Now, 2 Pages with MBS actually was featured there in one of the final episodes that Jay hosted back in November 2021, in case you're curious. But believe me, I'm still sweating a little having Jay come on as a guest for my podcast, because he knows what makes for a good podcast.



Jay ([02:47](#)):

Now when I appear on other shows, people go, "Wait, you analyze other shows with other hosts? What do I do when I have you on my show?" I'm like, "It's fine, I'm not judging, it's great. We're all out there trying to do meaningful things."

MBS ([02:59](#)):

Now, joking aside, Jay isn't here to take shows apart. Instead, he's actually looking for something very specific in the three clips and this is something that guides his own creative work.

Jay ([03:10](#)):

I believe that creativity happens in the minutia. I know we put it up on a pedestal and I certainly do sometimes, but it's become known as big. I got to pull a big stunt or do something big and if I can't do that, if I can't act like the heroes of mine, I guess I'm not creative. I just think it unfolds in these really tiny moments.

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

Now, if you're wondering what the tiny moments look like in practice, well, the two pages that Jay's going to read for us has a pretty profound example. Now, here's what Jay told me that shook me up in terms of how I was thinking about success for the podcast.

Jay ([03:43](#)):

We're so focused on being visible that I think we've forgotten to try and be memorable, but I think that's actually the job.

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

Be memorable, be memorable. That's nice, isn't it? And he put it a slightly different way another time when he was talking to me, which is like, "How do you make your podcast somebody's favorite?" Not just like, but it's like, "This is a



favorite podcast of mine or a favorite thing of mine." It's all too easy to get into ah, I've got to churn stuff out if you're a maker or a creator and you feel like you have an obligation to your audience.

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

I just see so much settling or focusing in the wrong places to try and elevate our creative work, whether we're marketers or solo creators or entrepreneurs or leaders. I'm on a bit of a mission to try and help people make what matters most to their careers and their companies and their communities.

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

Make what matters most. We're going to come back to that, I promise. Now for someone to feel very strongly about something, there's usually a moment in their past where they have their heart broken. For Jay, it was working at Google. He got great marks in college and he got into his dream job in ad sales soon after that. But three years on the dream had definitely soured a little bit.

Jay ([05:05](#)):

I had this friend send me a YouTube video, which I watched a bunch of times throughout the day. Then when I went home, I showed my then roommates this video and I was super excited to show them this YouTube video. When I hit play, a pre-roll ad started and it was also before the skip button at that point. I A: felt really dumb and B: had a very random thought, which was, "Damn you Eric," because Eric was my colleague at Google who convinced the advertiser to run pre-roll ads and I'm getting the fruit of his labor. Then I realized, oh no, I do this job. I am affecting other people this same way. And given the scale of the work we do, this is potentially millions of people having a slightly worse moment in their day because of my work.



Jay ([05:51](#)):

We would rationalize why it was a good experience. I mean, I had colleagues get excited about Google offering an ad program that was a survey instead of a video ad and you'd answer a question before your video. They're like, "It's a wonderful experience for the customer." I'm like, "No, I want to view the video, not the ad interrupting it. I want to create that type of work," and I'm just convincing other people to create interruptions. I'd been thinking about quitting for a while and I quit and I got into this field called content marketing where I was able to create, yes, in a business context, but I never looked back from there.

MBS ([06:29](#)):

What was the moment when you stumbled over this idea of resonance, which seems to light you off at the moment?

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

I mean, I'd heard little bits and pieces of some insurgent thinking when I was working in marketing. Even doing content marketing, I was surrounded by a lot of low brow content and after thought work and settling or even just good intention to work. But people didn't have the skills, the direction, the mentorship, the budget and buy-in from their executives. So I'm surrounded by this content and I'm like, "Why are we doing it this way? What is going on?" Every so often you hear a soundbite on a slide or in a blog post where people go, "I don't want to make people like stuff. I want to make stuff people like." It's like, "Oh, okay. There's a thing there. There's something there."

MBS ([07:14](#)):

There's a thing, yeah.



Jay ([07:15](#)):

Or I remember being even in school, having good teachers read literature to you in a way that's emotional and performative. You're like, "Wow, that really hit me where I live," this is an emotion driven job. This is a way to make people feel and make you feel quite frankly, as a creator of the work. It'd always been simmering, but then I had this conversation once with a friend of mine, who's both a mentor and a good buddy, who runs a tech company here in Boston where I live, and I was pouring out my heart and soul to him. He looked at me and he's like, "Jay, the reason you can't stand the status quo of business is because you're somebody who's bothered by suck." I love the phrase. I was like, "Sure," but part of me was like, "That's it, so why don't I send up a little flare gun to the world to see if anyone else comes out of hiding? Because they may be afraid of speaking this out loud, but I feel this way."

Jay ([08:10](#)):

The thing we accept, the status quo, whatever the convention is, the inertia of business or marketing, or what have you, it's just sitting wrong with me and I'm sure other people feel this way, but maybe they don't feel empowered to say it. Maybe they don't have the privilege that I have to say it or whatever. So I started making this podcast called Unthinkable, which was trying to push people to think differently or better about the conventional thinking. To break from it, to make what matters most. Slowly by slowly, I do mean it was slowly, but some people started to say, "Oh my God, thank you for saying this. You're speaking to my soul, this is it." I realized that's the end game. It's not 10,000 downloads, it's five people saying things with passion as signal you should keep going. To me, that's resonance.

MBS ([08:59](#)):

Let me push back on this a little Jay, because there's one part of me agreeing furiously with everything you're saying, which is like, "Life's too short, try and transcend the suck." But there's also reality around needing to earn a living,



needing to be in an organization, needing to find an audience and have a thousand true fans who could fund you in some way. One way of hearing what you're saying is it's like disappear into your artistic cave and create beauty and create elegance and transcend the physical world. How do you walk the fine line between what reality demands of you and this call to create art that has resonance?

Jay ([09:49](#)):

I just think creativity is a form of leadership. I think this idea that you can't create meaningful art and also contribute positively to change, whether it's a for-profit organization or industry or communally and societally, I think what we're doing here is we're putting creativity and/or art in the category of self-expression with no other purpose. I think A: it's really hard to self-express and have nobody say, "Oh wow, that's for me." Your close loved ones, someone on the internet, et cetera, especially today where you can access people so easily. But more so I think it's this process of saying here where we stand is not going to cut it any longer. This is broken, something about this isn't sitting well with me.

Jay ([10:39](#)):

I think in the distance I see something better. Let's call that the mountain peak and I have no idea how to get it. I'm going to show up every day, every week, every edition, episode, article, you name it, to take a swing at the jungle between here and the mountain. I have no idea how to get there, but I'd like to. If you believe that, if you're like, "It's not good now, it could be better," then join me. I don't have all the answers. I'm not an expert, I'm an explorer. That exploration unfolding over time is the creative process.

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

When you have this vision for the future, and I do mean for the future, not of the future, not peering into your crystal ball, it's saying I want to build towards that. That's what I want to be the reality. Then you get to invite other people



who feel similarly. And instead of going in a hole somewhere like you suggested and trying to create something and then maybe pop out six months later, magically things get better, writing is a good example. I am writing whatever it is, my newsletter, my podcast, et cetera. I am writing to try and understand. I'm not writing because I already do.

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

Let me ask you this then, because what you are asking people to do is take a stand for the work that they're doing. Anytime you take a stand it takes courage. Knowing your love of stories and the archetype of what makes a great story, I'm wondering if there was a mentor for you who showed you what courage looks like in a situation like this?

Jay ([12:12](#)):

I've got very many digital mentors, as many of us do, where you maybe don't interact or interact digitally. But a few personal ones come to mind. I think about John Jack Shred, Mr. Shred, my high school English teacher and Mr. Shred or there's-

MBS ([12:27](#)):

Oh, I love high school English teachers. I've got a few of those myself, yeah.

Jay ([12:30](#)):

The Shredder. Here's this short guy, this very short guy with a little mop of gray and black hair and big glasses that would bounce along as he bounced along the halls. He'd get really red in the face when he got passionate about something, a little sweaty. He was an avid cyclist. I went to an all boy Catholic school in high school, in Connecticut. His tie would always be a little disheveled and loose. But he was a stickler, a lot of people who had him knew him as the stickler, who would measure the margins of the paper for the essay you submitted, go to that extreme.



Jay ([13:05](#)):

But I knew him as an inspirer because I remember watching him read Huck Finn. We had this little dinky annex outside the high school with a few classrooms. That's where I had, I think, junior year English with him. He'd read Huck Finn in such a way that he'd bring it to life, like the characters were buddies he hung out with. Or Gatsby, when they talk about the light away in the distance in Gatsby, he would gesture out the door. I was like, "I know nothing is out there, but holy crap, something is out there." [crosstalk 00:13:38] That's what this stuff is for, it's for the feeling of it.

Jay ([13:45](#)):

I'm speaking truly from the business perspective here, we really like to optimize away the feeling, we really like to remove the personal perspective or the challenger perspective or the inspiring perspective, because it doesn't feel "practical." Which I would push back on because what's something you can put in practice more than feeling inspired and having it affect everything you do or understanding good story structure and how to execute that when you communicate one to one or one to many? I mean, these things are practical as hell, they have such power. Someone like Shred showed me what this work is actually for and my job to honor his legacy, because unfortunately he's no longer with us, is to carry that with me, to try and infuse that in the work I do, despite all these effects of industrialized education or best practice laid in work.

Jay ([14:34](#)):

Despite those things, trying to remove the desire to emote, the desire to push and have vision and opine and the desire to express, but in such a way that you lead people. It's not just a little hobby on the side. Great if you have that, but using the creative craft to instill in others something that empowers and inspires them so they take action on the back end. That's really what it's for here. It's for sparking action, that's what stories are about. They're vehicles for bringing out



some sort of tension or problem, and then resolving them and encouraging others to go along with you too.

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

Speaking of role models, tell me about the book you're choosing to read from today.

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

A character that looms large in my life, in my storytelling career and in many things, even the entertainment that I consume, is Anthony Bourdain, like very many millions of people. Perhaps unlike many millions of people I am of the belief that the business world deserves Bourdain-like storytelling.

MBS ([15:35](#)):

Nice.

Jay ([15:37](#)):

I mentioned this mission of mine. Well, the approach I have to that mission is to tell a lot of stories and is to try and bring these kinds of stories that he told in his books, in his TV shows, on stages. I got to see him speak a couple times live. Try and bring that stuff to the workplace because just like Bourdain helped us understand nuance and meaning in seemingly day to day moments, we have those moments every day in work. But oftentimes work content is whatever, screaming about Elon Musk, Bitcoin and Facebook one more time or vapid Instagram influencers posting meaningless quotes that sound nice and get liked, but ultimately don't change you at all. Bourdain brought forth such meaning from the seemingly day to day and so I aspire to do that in my storytelling.



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

Well, how did Bourdain change you? I'm going to hear the two pages, but that statement around stories change people, how has he changed you?

Jay ([16:34](#)):

I think he was my introduction to creative non-fiction. Not the formal introduction per se. I had a college class actually about creative non-fiction and I remember reading Kazuo Ishiguro and all these other writers, but it was like he took the colloquial tone that I wanted to write in, which I got from sports. Bill Simmons and writers like that, Rick Riley, and applied it to these very personal narratives that still exposed you to ideas and feelings. I would say tiny stories with big ideas. This is where his travel show, I think makes people forget this, his writing and even his show was not really about some earth shattering thing that he was discovering or experiencing, even if he was visiting in a location that seems exotic to you.

Jay ([17:34](#)):

The Parts Unknown name of his show, the unknown parts were just sitting with a family and going deeper and getting to know them and finding these ideas and moments that contained a lot of meaning, that contained big ideas and helped change you. But he was finding them in the seemingly routine. Again, that's very applicable to our work. That's what he showed me, I think. That's how he changed my approach to story. It's tiny stories told in such ways that you see the big idea and the big impact of them.

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

Beautiful and I can see the book, I love how battered it is and well loved it is.

Jay ([18:08](#)):

The book is Kitchen Confidential, that's the one I pulled from.



MBS ([18:13](#)):

And how did you choose the two pages?

Jay ([18:16](#)):

Honestly, it was pretty much just whatever stuck with me. I mentioned I'm trying to explore what makes work memorable. These were, among other moments in the book, probably the moment that loomed largest was the one I'll be reading to you.

MBS ([18:30](#)):

Perfect. Why don't I make a quick introduction and then you can launch into it. Jay Acunzo, host of the podcast Unthinkable, amongst other things, reading from Anthony Bourdain's very wonderful book, Kitchen Confidential, published in, I think 2008. Jay, over to you.

Jay ([18:51](#)):

"At 6:00 in the morning, we boarded Monsieur [foreign language 00:18:55] small wooden vessel with our picnic baskets and our sensible footwear. He was a crusty old bastard, dressed like my uncle in ancient denim coveralls, espadrilles and a beret. He had a leathery tanned and windblown face, hollow cheeks and tiny broken blood vessels on nose and cheeks that everyone seemed to have from drinking so much of the local Bordeaux. He hadn't fully briefed his guests on what was involved in these daily travails. We putt putted out to a buoy marking his underwater oyster park, a fenced off section of bay bottom and we sat and sat and sat in the roaring August sun, waiting for the tide to go out. The idea was to float the boat over the stockaded fence walls, and then sit there until the boat slowly sank with the water level, until it rested on the Basson floor.



Jay ([19:42](#)):

At this point, Monsieur [foreign language 00:19:44] and his guests presumably would rake the oysters, collect a few good specimens for sale in port and remove any parasites that might be endangering his crop. There was, I recall, still about two feet of water left before the hull of the boat settled on dry ground and we could walk about the park. We'd already polished off the Brie and the baguettes and downed the Evian, but I was still hungry and characteristically said so. Monsieur [foreign language 00:20:09] on hearing this as if challenging his American passengers, inquired in his thick [foreign language 00:20:15] accent, if any of us would care to try an oyster.

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

My parents hesitated. I doubt they'd realized they might actually have to eat one of the raw slimy things we were currently floating over. My little brother recoiled in horror. But I, in the proudest moment of my young life, stood up smartly grinning with defiance and volunteered to be the first. And in that unforgettably sweet moment in my personal history, that one moment still more alive for me than so many of the other firsts that followed, first pussy, first joint, first day in high school, first published book or any other thing, I attained glory. Monsieur [foreign language 00:20:53] beckoned me over to the gun wall where he leaned over, reached down until his head nearly disappeared underwater and emerged holding a single silt encrusted oyster, huge and irregularly shaped in his rough claw-like fist.

Jay ([21:07](#)):

With a snubby, rust covered oyster knife he popped the thing open and handed it to me, everyone watching now. My little brother shrinking away from this glistening, vaguely sexual looking object, still dripping and nearly alive. I took it in my hand, tilted the shell back into my mouth as instructed by the now beaming Monsieur [foreign language 00:21:26], and with one bite and a slurp, wolfed it down. It tasted of seawater, of brine and flesh, and somehow of the



future. Everything was different now, everything. I'd not only survived, I'd enjoyed. This, I knew was the magic of which I had until now only been dimly and spitefully aware. I was hooked.

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

My parents' shutters, my little brother's expression of unrestrained revulsion and amazement only reinforced the sense that I had somehow become a man. I had had an adventure, tasted forbidden fruit and everything that followed in my life, the food, the long and often stupid and self-destructive chase for the next thing, whether it was drugs or sex or some other new sensation, would all stem from this moment. I'd learn something viscerally, instinctively, spiritually, even in some small [inaudible 00:22:20] way, sexually and there was no turning back. The genie was out of the bottle. My life as a cook and as a chef had begun."

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

Oh, that is fantastic. Beautifully read, well navigated around all the French words.

Jay ([22:38](#)):

I'd say not, but okay.

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

Yeah. What is it about that story that is resonant for you, Jay?

Jay ([22:50](#)):

I mean, what really happens? Let's start there. What actually happened there? He was a petulant young American traveler with his family in France, that up until that moment really hadn't appreciated food. He went out on a tiny little boat, which if you grew up on the shore in Connecticut like I did, pretty routine and mundane. They had finished their snacks and were starting to complain



about being hungry, what a childlike/adult Jay-like thing to do. Where are the snacks? And the guy running the boat handed him an oyster and he tried it.

Jay ([23:25](#)):

Another way to look at this is like, "Anthony Bourdain, when did you first start thinking more critically about food?" It was actually my first oyster. I was traveling with my family in this little French village and I had a first oyster. It tasted like this, I'll never forget it. That's one way to tell this story. Instead, you get two pages of power. Two pages of taking a tiny little moment and understanding that that's what life is. Right. If we think life has meaning, then inherently all these little moments that just make up our life have meaning.

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

It can't just be the big visible dots along the map. It's all the little things in between. It's that gradation of drawing the line second after second moment after moment. That's where the meaning can come from. The problem is we don't often dive deep enough or reflect on it or tell the stories of those moments to then extrapolate out what are the insights, what did we learn, what changed, how are we feeling? I mean, this is a moment just like an oyster to me. It's just dense with nuance and feeling and goodness.

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

And the future.

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

And the future.

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

Jay, how do we learn to recognize our own heroic stories, because this is a heroic story. This is the moment of coming to a crossroad and going left instead of right and everything changes. I think you're right when you say too often we



miss those. We don't mythologize ourselves and we miss the chance to be on our heroic quest. How do you help or how have you found yourself finding and naming your own stories?

Jay ([25:07](#)):

You mentioned mentors earlier and another mentor I've had professionally is a marketing speaker and author by the name of Andrew Davis. He's the Willy Wonka of marketing ideas, it's incredible. He just goes traipsing through an industry and finds all these whimsical ideas and pulls out all these frameworks. But what's really interesting about Drew is the way he thinks is very much like his work is a quest. He probably has one career long grand quest, but then he has these little trips he goes on, little adventures, little investigations to explore these subtopics under his large topic. What opened up possibility for me was not only experiencing stories like the one I just read, but also understanding that you can spot those a lot easier if your lens through which you see the world changes.

Jay ([25:58](#)):

The way Drew coached me to change my lens is to think of the work as this constant exploration of something. The macro level mission I have is to help others make what matters, okay. That may or may not be interesting to you. Maybe right now you're more interested in this idea of resonance. How do I connect deeper with those on the receiving end of my work to grow my business or leave my legacy or have this project succeed? Maybe that's what gets you into my work. Regardless of the macro level lens or the current lens, that's what's in the back of my mind at all times.

Jay ([26:31](#)):

The other day I was going down a one way road and I saw a woman hanging out of her car with the door open. It was this really big black truck, Ford F-150 style, that had been propped up to be even bigger. And her door was just wide open



and her leg was out. Cars make noise, I don't have an electric vehicle, although I aspire to get one. So my car was making noise, not 10 feet from her leg and she still didn't budge. Now I have these details and there's something there. It could be a metaphor, it could just be a playful description. It could be creating a character out of this woman and her truck. There's just something there and how do I apply that to the journey I'm on to understand resonance or to help people make what matters? I don't know, but that's a thread I'm going to save for a later date and I'll pull it the next time I open up my laptop to write.

Jay ([27:21](#)):

With Bourdain, with his book, with his approach, those tiny moments, you understand not only how to spot them, but where to take them if you understand the larger mission or premise at play.

MBS ([27:34](#)):

Right. Years ago, I created a little video called... What was it called? Getting stuck in the... Was it the messy middle? Which is you're neither doing one thing or the other. What I love that you're pointing us to is the power of the tiny things in the moment, but also the bigger picture as well and having to see both of those to plot the journey.

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

How did you get clear on the bigger picture for you? Because most people aren't articulate as you are to say, "Look, this is the a quest, helping people make things that matter." Did it just slowly come into focus? Was there a moment where you just wrote it down and went, "That's the thing," stick that above my computer screen and look at it every day. When did it come to you?

Jay ([28:27](#)):

Well, the metaphor will continue here because I was talking about how this changes how you see the world. How do you understand what glasses to wear?



Not only the frames, but also the prescription. You go, "Number one or number two, number two or number three." Then you try on different frames. Like, "Does this look good? I don't know. Does this look good?" Then you ask people close to you. "Does this look good on my face? Does this look good?" That's the process, it's trial and error. It's experimentation. A lot of us want the one pithy framework or answer to be like, "Oh, that's how I do it in theory, I go zero to 60 like this." That's not reality.

Jay ([28:58](#)):

I mean, looking at my early career, working in corporations in marketing, I learned a lot. I gained a lot of skills, made a lot of connections. I was also frustrated as hell for most of those jobs because I was trying on these things that didn't fit. Then eventually I find something and go, "Oh well, that's a thing that brings me energy instead of draining me of that energy. Let me pursue that further."

Jay ([29:21](#)):

My podcast, Unthinkable is a good microcosm because it started as I want to help people break from the stale conventions of marketing and do something more creative, so I told a bunch of stories like that. Then I start talking to my listeners and I'm like, "Wait, you're a CTO, you're an accountant. What are you doing listening to this show?" And they would tell me more about what they were experiencing and who they were and why they liked it. And I went, "Okay, so it's not about the creative side of marketing. It's about craft driven work. People who see themselves as crafts people, no matter what they do." They could work on a spreadsheet. They could paint something, they could write a novel, they could work in marketing. And so it just kept evolving.

Jay ([29:59](#)):

It's messy. The jungle analogy is another one that applies here too. It's I'm hacking away through the jungle, that's my creative practice. And someone



might say, "Try going left here," and that's a good mentor. Or I might uncover a path that lets me run freer for a time. But then I hit another snag in the future. And as long as I'm trying to articulate to you what the vision is, where is this going, why am I doing this and invite you along, I get wonderful signal feedback, people course correcting me all around me. But none of this happens unless you ship a lot of work. I mean, I think that's the punchline to all this, is having the consistent practice to put out the work into the world, to aerate your ideas and refine them over time. That's everything to me.

MBS ([30:43](#)):

There's a quote I love which is, "Inspiration is when your past suddenly makes sense." Where you like, "Oh, that's why I had that job that sucked and that job that didn't suck and I met that person and I had that course." It comes together in a moment of remembering and forgetting and clarification that says, "Oh, this feels like the resonant thing for you."

Jay ([31:05](#)):

Well, I always picture motivation as driven from behind you. It's somebody pushing you often in a corporate setting with a whip. Inspiration to me is like you're getting pulled forward. I can't not figure that out. That's why when you think about being inspired to write, I don't think it's like the inspiration is this huge idea, this lightning strike moment. The muse visited you, all these myths. I don't think that's inspiration for creative purposes. I think what it is I can't not write right now, I'm drawn to it. I have to see how do I articulate this complex idea in writing? Or I don't understand this concept, let me try to write something about it and force myself to try and understand. Or even better, it's like, "I can't not write because when I don't write for a long period of time, I feel like I'm suffocating." I literally feel like it's a breath of fresh air to finally publish a thing.

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



A lot of people are like, "I want to be a writer and I'm struggling to write and blah, blah, blah." It's like, "Well, maybe you haven't found the thing that pulls you towards it, instead of looking for motivation or other external forces to push you towards it," which I think will die eventually. It's better to find the magnet that draws you in, that inspiration, than I think the motivation of I need a quote, a mentor, a system, a 30 day challenge to push me. Maybe to kickstart it, but that's not sustainable.

MBS ([32:25](#)):

Talking to you Jay, it feels like you're at a, let's call it a plateau of achievement, which is clarity on what you're doing and the journey that you're on and the way that you're contributing to the world. I also know from how I understand structure and stories that the quest is endless. You've got to the latest place, there's still a valley in front of you with jungle and mist and there's still a peak. Part of, as they say, going into the woods is about meeting the next part of yourself that needs to become who you are. I'm curious to know what's the quest you are on now? What's the next thing that needs to be part of Jay Acunzo?

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

I think a lot about my body of work and just building a body of work in general, there's that famous quote from Ira Glass, for example. I'll paraphrase but, "When you start out especially, your work-

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

The gap is big.

Jay ([33:34](#)):

Yeah, "The gap is big between your taste and your work." Another easier way to, I think, understand it is you can imagine better work than you can create. I think that's always and I think actually a danger zone is I can imagine this, what I'm



imagining is also exactly what I created, because then you're in your comfort zone a little bit too much. I found myself for a while through my public speaking business, through my podcast and my writing, going through the motions and those motions were getting too repetitive.

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

What the problem was is I had an old habit that was so necessary early, that I need to unlearn. Which is early on, especially all these wise individuals like Ira Glass, they would encourage you do a lot of work, put in the reps consistently. You have to get over this fear of shipping. Then you have to build your body of work. Opportunities will come. Skills will be honed, et cetera. And I agree, but I think you also then get past this first filter of like, "Am I shipping or not?" Then shipping is no longer a problem and the next problem is well, what am I pursuing here? Am I going deeper? Am I doing A+ work or just more B work or C or D?

MBS ([34:44](#)):

Now I can do it, should I keep doing it?

Jay ([34:46](#)):

Right. How do you persist properly or persist with greater joy or impact on the world? I think I'm now entering a phase of my career where the practice needs to look a lot less like every week I will show up and ship this thing and I'm promising it. It's a weekly show and blah, blah, blah. I'm now thinking about what am I spending time on that is a longer time horizon, that is scarier for me to try to do, that there is not this established playbook out in the world or in my own history that I have to just try it because I'm still drawn to it? I feel inspired to do it, but I don't have the mechanics yet. It feels like it's the jungle at once got sparse and that was dangerous. I took a left turn, now it's dense again. That's where I feel like I'm at.



MBS ([35:33](#)):

What is the next level for you? What do you aspire to?

Jay ([35:39](#)):

I mean, I want to bring these Bourdainian type stories into the workplace, into the business world. I want to do so without selling my soul and be like, "We're talking about Facebook, Apple, Amazon, and Google again," or we're talking about macro level trends or tips and tricks and best practices. I'd like to help people see their work better, figure out their purpose in their work, but then go turn that into creative action. The way I phrase it is I like being an arms dealer for creative scrapers. I'm not speaking to the people who are managing budgets and six agencies. I'm speaking to the person who's a one person shop or runs a team of 50 that they're like, "Well, what we do is boring, or, "Well, we've done it forever this way," or, "I'm a solo creator or artist and what do I have to offer the world? I'm just going to copy everyone else and try to do 'what works.'"

Jay ([36:32](#)):

There's this tyranny of the right answer we all suffer from in the workplace. I think best practices are dangerous. I think they deserve to be questioned and the goal is to find what works best for you, which often is not the "best practice." The way I want to help people do that is not to get on a stage and shout and be angst-y about it. But it's to try and tell these stories that make you go, "Huh, I think I lost sight of that somewhere along the way. Thanks for reminding me. I'm back at it now, I'm focused." Or, "Wow! I hadn't considered that. A piece of my brain was shrouded in mystery or a shadow has been lifted. Thank you for that."

Jay ([37:13](#)):

How do I do that? I'm focusing on the show, I'm focusing on Unthinkable. I'm focusing on this idea of resonance and I'm trying to push myself to find better



stories in the nooks and crannies of this world and not yet another similar headline to everywhere else you can get this stuff.

MBS ([37:29](#)):

It feels to me as you describe that, particularly this idea of bringing Bourdainian stories into the business world, the archetype that comes to mind is the trickster, playing that disruptive role. Do you have any insight or do you know how to navigate this idea of being disruptive and provocative and slightly upending things in a system that loves not that? That loves homeostasis, which is a system, an organization set up to not be disrupted. It feels like you're trying to disrupt. How do you do that without the system rejecting you?

Jay ([38:12](#)):

Okay, here is the lesson that I needed to learn earlier in my in-house career where I was just the tail wagging the dog, or where I was petulant and that contributed to my frustration. It's really hard to create change by having all these big ideas or commands of other people that force them to leap too far from where they're already at or what they think they already want. An easy example is your boss. You're probably not going to convince your boss and/or the larger company and its culture to change A: quickly or B: from what they already want. What you're probably more likely to succeed in doing if your goal is change, if your goal is elevating the work, if your goal is doing something better, is to show them how what they want is actually not being served by the status quo and it's far better to go with your idea.

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

In other words, my idea gets us what we want faster, better, cheaply to a higher degree, with greater impact et cetera. I call this the green smoothie problem. If I had handed you a smoothie, Michael, and you'd never seen a green smoothie, you would do one of two things. You'd anchor to preconceived notions or you'd look for social proof. You'd be like, "Oh, this looks like this gross health drink at



my gym. No, thank you." Or you'd be like, "Okay, show me what people are saying about this drink. Is it popular? Is it trendy?" In other words, give me the fact that this is essentially conventional. It's a commodity and that's no way to make change.

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

I'm not going to lose face by drinking the green smoothie.

Jay ([39:41](#)):

So by handing you my idea too quickly, too soon, before you're ready, I create this information disadvantage that I'm putting you at. And to fill in that gap you're like, "I need to just think about my own history, preconceived notions and the past, bad ways to improve the world and also, or look for other social moments of social proof." In other words, it's already happening, it's already trendy. Again, hard to push you to the new. What I need to do is say, "Michael, you know how you told me last week you want to be healthy and you told me all these drinks and foods are really gross? Here's what I'm thinking. I took some kale, some mango, some mango. I took a little coconut oil. We have a blender in the kitchen and in no time flat, I made this drink. So if you'd like to be healthy and you believe that a lot of these health drinks and foods are gross, here's a green smoothie. Want to drink it?"

MBS ([40:30](#)):

Look at you, using old school marketing on me to raise above marketing.

Jay ([40:36](#)):

I was abducted by marketing and sales, experimented on, but I was given a metal arm and super strength that I wouldn't have had otherwise. Now I know how to speak that stuff to that stuff and use that stuff for good. I think I was temporarily not on the force for good and now that I'm awake again, I'd like to use this stuff for good. I think we're all better off wading into those waters of



like, "Yes, the business world. Yes, the for profit world. Yes, capitalism," and using those forces as sources of leverage for good. That's what I'm trying to do here.

MBS ([41:10](#)):

I get it. Well, welcome to the light. Jay, it's been a great conversation, thank you. Let me ask you this, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?

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

I heard this on a podcast from the comedian Mike Birbiglia, where he was interviewing Rachel [crosstalk 00:41:33]. Oh, he's incredible. He was interviewing Rachel Bloom of Crazy Ex-girlfriend and he was asking her to explain her thinking and her process. She said, "When comedians talk about comedy, there's a fair bit of Kabuki theater that goes on." I know it's a throwaway or funny line, but I took that to heart. When creative people or successful people or entrepreneurs or executives talk about their process or their ideas, there's a fair bit of exaggerated motion. Sometimes it helps you see something complex a little easier, because you're going above and beyond to exaggerate that motion. But oftentimes it shrouds what went on under the hood in this aura or myth and I don't want to do that.

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

All of this started for me as just, I think I like to make stuff and I like to make myself feel stuff when I make that stuff. I think I can find others who feel like I did. Like I mentioned very briefly, the author Kazuo Ishiguro and he had this wonderful quote about storytelling when he accepted his Nobel Prize in, I think 2017. Where he said, "Stories are like saying to others, this is how it feels to me. Do you understand what I'm saying? Does this feel this way to you too?" That's it. I think it can at least start that simply and as it gets complex and you start to lace it with frameworks and big ideas and change making concepts and all these things, we can lose sight of that. But I think if we reset to it, that's enough.



Jay ([43:04](#)):

Bourdain talked about asking simple questions and telling simple stories and not doing workman-like storytelling, but trying avant garde or different or out there ideas that just interested him. I think that's all we need, is I'm trying to say this is how this felt to me. Do you know what I'm saying? In other words, am I communicating clearly? Okay, did it also feel that way to you? Because this is actually a conversation, even if it feels broadcast. Now giving that greater understanding, I get a next attempt and I could be better for it. That's it, I think it can be that simple.

MBS ([43:41](#)):

When Jay talks about the little things, I'm reminded of a connected insight. This time from the Harvard academic, Teresa Amabile. In her book, *The Progress Principle*, she reveals that people find meaning in their work by making a little bit of progress on something that matters most days. This is the reason why at the end of my day, my working day, I have an alarm on my phone that chimes. It's at 5:24 on Monday through Thursday, 3:24 p.m. on Friday. I've tinkered with the alarm message so when it goes off, a little message pops up that says, "Stop working and celebrate the day." Typically, what I do is I stop working and I open my little journal and I write down one, two, three things that I just want to remember that I actually did the day. I would say this, it's this little bit of progress on the little things that seem to lead to the bigger progress on the bigger things.

MBS ([44:41](#)):

Now, you know I always recommend a couple of other interviews you might want to go back and check out. I'd say just two here. Jessica Abel, that was called *How To Survive Being Creative*. Such a great title for a podcast. She's a real dynamic maker and creator. And also Seth Levin, *How To Build Something*, coming from a slightly different perspective, because he's actually a venture capitalist. Now, if you want more of Jay, his book is called *Break The Wheel* and



his podcast is Unthinkable. But I'd suggest you go to his website, I should say jayacunzo.com. It's a hub for everything. Let me spell that out for you. J-A-Y-A-C-U-N-Z-O.com.

MBS ([45:26](#)):

Thank you for waving the flag, thank you for listening to these episodes. Thank you for any love you've given the show, a rating, a ranking, a review. These things all just help the algorithm go. This is a podcast that people like, I should recommend it to more people. But of course the best recommendation is when you recommend it to somebody and a particular episode, like this episode you should know about and pass the word along. Thank you for that. I'll finish by saying you're awesome and you're doing great.