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

What's your relationship with the word, with the idea, ambition? Would you say that you are ambitious? If I pointed a finger at you and said, "Look, you are ambitious," how would you react? "Oh, no. No, no. Don't accuse me of that," or, "Yeah. Yeah, for sure." Or perhaps, "Maybe. Maybe it just depends on what you mean by ambition."

MBS ([00:24](#)):

I feel I'm ambitious and also not ambitious. These two states coexist within me. I am ambitious because I want to grow into the best of who I am, to have a life of contentment and do work that matters to me. And I'm not ambitious because some of the, let's call them, status based trophies... I'm using that in kind speech marks. Well, they just don't seem to matter to me as they once perhaps did. But, honestly, I'm always pretty irked when I hear people, like me,



talking about how now they're above and beyond the petty ambitions of mere mortals. It kind of feels like a humble brag about, I don't know, "I've achieved enlightenment. What's wrong with the rest of you?" Because I realized that it's only by having chased and pursued, and in some cases won, some of those other trophies earlier on, driven for external validation and recognition, only by that have I started to appreciate what my bigger and perhaps more internally goals might be.

MBS ([01:34](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. This is the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Let me introduce you to Shellye Archambeau. She is the author of *Unapologetically Ambitious*. Now, Shellye was ranked one of the 100 most influential business leaders in America. And that reflects a 30-year career, where she was in leadership roles for various organizations, IBM, Blockbuster, various tech companies. And now, she's been on a wide range of board companies for coming up to 20 years. So she really understands ambition at the highest echelons of organizational life. But here's where that started.

Shellye ([02:22](#)):

I'm a little black girl that grew up in the 1960s, who in a world that was very racially-charged, where half the people wanted civil rights. And the other half didn't, learned very early that there were a lot of people that didn't think much would happen for her and, frankly, didn't even want much to happen for her.

MBS ([02:41](#)):

But Shellye had aspirations to the contrary, although they did start humble.



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

All I wanted was to make enough money to keep my thermostat at 72 degrees in the wintertime. Very simple. How much of money do I have to make to keep my thermostat at 72? Because our house never went above 68.

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

Well, that was a humble goal, but a goal nonetheless. And early on, Shellye started a path of setting and achieving such goals that eventually went beyond just the thermostat, at least her literal thermostat.

Shellye ([03:11](#)):

Went to college and decided that I wanted to run a company because I enjoyed running clubs, etcetera. So I set in my sites, but when I looked around, there weren't people that look like me running companies and especially not in tech, which was the industry I chose.

MBS ([03:23](#)):

That successful career unfolded rising through IBM and then onto assorted senior roles. But what was it that took Shellye from a girl whose goal was just to keep her thermostat a little higher to leading in an industry that is not only notoriously difficult for women to rise to the most senior levels, but especially people of color? So first of all, Shellye would probably point to her husband and we'll talk about him in just a moment. But there was inner game work for her to do as well.

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

Oh gosh. The first thing is I needed to overcome imposter syndrome. And I say overcome it. I don't know that I ever actually overcame it. I just learned how to deal with it. But especially early on, I just felt, "Oh my gosh. One day, they're going to figure it out. They're going to figure out that I'm not that smart, not that bright. Figure out that I don't know what I'm doing, that I don't belong here," I



mean all those things. And it can really hold you back and keep you from taking risks or putting your name forward or volunteering for the job, the opportunity, whatever it might be. So that was probably the hardest for me was working through imposter syndrome.

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

And you talked about the role of your husband, Scotty, in helping nurture some of this. Was there something he was able to say or do, or just in how he was, that allowed that to take root? Because it's no small thing.

Shellye ([04:45](#)):

No. It's no small thing at all. And honestly, he was my cheerleader. He really was. He was the one that was like, "Shellye, you can do anything. You can do anything." And when I come back and say, "Oh my God. I don't know if I can do this," the whole bit, he'd be the one to say, "Of course, you can. Look what you've done so far." I mean, he was unwavering in his just ultimate support, no matter what doubts or fears that I had. And I talk about it because over time, other people became my cheerleaders too. And I think it's really important in life to have cheerleaders around you because life is really hard. People don't talk about that part but it really is hard.

MBS ([05:22](#)):

So where do you find those cheerleaders? Because not all of us have a, Scotty, in our life. And not all of us have cheerleaders in our life. And I'm wondering do you just get lucky or is there a way that you can find and nurture that support around you, that people who see you and hear you then say, "I can see bigger things for you"?

Shellye ([05:44](#)):

Yes. I think you can nurture it. And I think that's how I have other cheerleaders beyond Scotty. When people pay you a compliment, when they give you



support, many of us don't accept it. And what I mean by don't accept it is we say, "Oh, no. Not really," or just your kidding. We brush it aside. Right?

MBS ([06:03](#)):

Yeah.

Shellye ([06:03](#)):

Because many times, we're just a little embarrassed that you're putting me in the spotlight. But what I'll tell you is those people who pay compliments, who actually give you encouragement and the whole thing, don't push them aside. When they do it, take the breath and say, "Thank you. Thank you." And say, "I really appreciate it because sometimes, this is really hard." What I find is you have to be vulnerable in order to let people in. And if they feel like you've let them in, then they'll continue to support you. And the other way to get cheerleaders is become a cheerleader yourself.

MBS ([06:41](#)):

I love that. Yeah.

Shellye ([06:41](#)):

Tell, "Hey, Michael. You did a fantastic job at that."

MBS ([06:45](#)):

Why thank you, Shellye. That is true.

Shellye ([06:48](#)):

Right. And then later on, if you see me do something, you might take the time, "Shellye's always supporting me. Let me support her." So there are multiple ways, but giving is a great way of getting support and getting help.



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

Yeah. You talk about nurturing vulnerability. And, of course, there's always this interesting tension between ambition and vulnerability. Here's a hypothesis. And I don't know you so I'm just making it up, Shellye. But I imagine being a woman of color holding ambitions like this, actually, you're putting an armor rather than increasing vulnerability because you've got to code shift. You've got to code switch. You've got to play all sorts of games. You got to not show vulnerability because that's a more easily exploitable thing from people who hold power and hold influence. How do you balance that tension between actually to succeed when there aren't people who look like you, or sound like you? In those roles, you need to be a certain way. But also great leadership has a degree of vulnerability in it as well.

Shellye ([07:58](#)):

Yes. And you raised an excellent point because you're right. As I was coming up, especially early in my career, it was all about the armor. It was all about the armor, unless I was really close to you, then you actually got to... And if you will know the real me, et cetera. But what I learned is people found me intimidating and it's like, "Really? Me?" But that was because of this armor of not letting people in. And if you don't really let them in, then they don't really get to know you. And the bottom line is people want to work with people they actually like. So it's not a matter of trying to work too hard to be liked. That's not what I mean, but if you don't give them a chance to actually get to know you, then it's hard for that to happen.

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

So you have to take the risk. And what I've learned is vulnerability and ambition go hand-in-hand. It's really hard to achieve your aspirations if you aren't ever vulnerable. Because back to the point of people don't really get to know you. And if they don't really get to know you, it's hard for them to become real supporters of you. Right?



MBS ([09:07](#)):

Right.

Shellye ([09:07](#)):

All those things go hand-in-hand. So I had to learn that and learn how to be vulnerable. And trust me, there's different levels. Right?

MBS ([09:14](#)):

Right.

Shellye ([09:14](#)):

And I would say even well into being a CEO, I was more vulnerable, but I had to really work on it by opening up who I am. And it's not comfortable at times, but it pays big dividends. So now, I feel very open, very transparent, all those things. And that's come with a confidence.

MBS ([09:37](#)):

Was there a person that role modeled a way of vulnerability that worked for you?

Shellye ([09:44](#)):

That's a really good question. I would say there were a few people. One later in life was probably a man by the name of Bill Campbell.

MBS ([09:55](#)):

Famous. Yeah.

Shellye ([09:56](#)):

Yeah. He was a Silicon Valley icon and I was fortunate that he was actually a mentor of mine.



MBS ([10:01](#)):

Beautiful.

Shellye ([10:02](#)):

And Bill believed in love. I mean, really got it. He really did. So when he saw you, forget being politically correct on the whole bit, it was a big bear hug. First thing he always talked about was family and personal and he'd share his too, daughter played soccer. He was coach. And it was like, "Wow, if this big bear of a man, who was able to achieve and do all these things can be just as open and vulnerable and warm et cetera, then this can be done. This can be done.

MBS ([10:34](#)):

It feels, to me, that when you're a leader in an organization, certainly as a CEO of a big company, but even when you're just managing a team and you're mid-level manager, you've got this tension between, "I am trying to show love and I got to get stuff done. I'm got to make decisions about people in terms of their capacity and what they're doing, not just in terms of their humanity." I'm wondering how you find that balance, particularly when you're CEO, Shellye. Because when you lead a company of some thousands of people, you can't love all of them. You don't even know all of them. You're seeing them as human capital rather than human beings. How do you navigate that?

Shellye ([11:20](#)):

Yeah. So let's talk about language for a minute. To me, love is the overarching, but the way people typically experience love... And here I'm not talking about a relationship like marriage or something like that. But the way people actually experience it is through caring. And if you think about it, at our very core, what everyone wants is to be cared about. We want to know that our spouse cares about us or our boyfriend, our parents, our kids. And it's not what we say. It's not what we say. I can say, "Michael, I care for you every single day." But if my actions don't actually show that I care, it's meaningless. So they want to know



you care, but they want to know it through actions. Do you keep them in mind? Are you thoughtful? It's all these things that make up caring.

Shellye ([12:13](#)):

Well, guess what? That's not true just in your personal life. People want to know that you care about them at work too. So how you do that, it's by demonstrating caring and demonstrating caring is basically having the person's interest at heart and showing that you actually see them. Now, that doesn't mean there aren't hard conversations. There are hard conversations. I remember in terms of conversation with a person and they had gotten to the point where they really weren't going to go any farther in this particular company for a combination of reasons, the company itself, what we needed, what they wanted to do, the whole bit. And so it's suggesting that they leave, take the package and leave. Well, I'll tell you know, that person years later, we still have a good relationship. Best decision ever happened to him because they ended up in an environment in which they could thrive and actually continue.

Shellye ([13:07](#)):

So just because you have to have tough conversations... It's just like families. We have tough conversations with siblings and kids and spouses all the time. But we do it because we care about them. So we have to have the conversation so we can actually move forward. And that's it. As long as you come to the conversation with care in mind and their interest in mind and helping people see it from their perspective, it works.

MBS ([13:33](#)):

Yeah. Shellye, tell me about the book you've chosen to read for us.



Shellye ([13:38](#)):

Absolutely. The book is called All You Have to Do Is Ask and it's by Wayne Baker and is a professor. And the reason this book spoke to me is what we talked about it a little bit. Right, Michael?

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

Yes.

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

I've always believed in driving your ambitions and going after your aspirations, yes, you need to be intentional. Yes. You need to work hard. Yes. There are a lot of things you need to do. But the one thing that I think is critical to do is you have to ask for help. Nobody achieves anything of significance all by themselves.

MBS ([14:15](#)):

That's true.

Shellye ([14:15](#)):

No one. And if they said they did, they're lying. I'm just telling you. Nobody does. So therefore, don't think you're the only person on the planet who's going to be able to do it. But here's the challenge. I say, "Ask for help." I've asked for a lot of help. It's made all the difference but how do you do it? Most of us are actually really uncomfortable asking for help. And so the fact that Wayne wrote an entire book on how to ask for help, it just complimented a belief that I've always had, which is "We all need to ask for help." Because I found that if you ask someone for help in the right way, most people actually are willing to be helpful. Right?

MBS ([14:58](#)):

That's right.



Shellye ([14:58](#)):

So, anyway, that's why this book I found to be very special because it's tactical, tangible examples, advice. Here's how you do it.

MBS ([15:10](#)):

When did it come into your life? I mean, how did you discover it?

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

Actually, I discovered it because, like I said, I talk a lot about asking for help and letting people know what you want, all those things. And he reached out to me. He had been doing a lot of research in this space and was writing a book on this topic. And so he was like, "Hey, I'm writing a book on this topic." And so he sent it to me. And so read it. I said, "Absolutely. This is terrific." Anyway, so that's how this came into my life and it's something that I share.

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

Yeah. Because it's relatively new. It's a couple of years old so I'm delighted you're bringing it to us. And how did you choose what two pages to read from?

Shellye ([15:48](#)):

Oh, that was the hardest part. Let me tell you. I scanned like, "Two pages. Two pages." Well, the way I did it was I looked at, "Okay, let me pull out at least a couple of key themes and even a couple key messages that, just in two pages, people should be able to get." And encourage them that, "Hey, there's actually more in here, if you look for it.

MBS ([16:09](#)):

Perfect. Well, Shellye, I am excited to hear your two pages. So let me pass the mic to you metaphorically, at least, and over to you to read from All You Have to Do Is Ask by Wayne Baker. Shellye, over to you.



Shellye ([16:26](#)):

Giving and receiving is a cycle that begins with an ask. The law of giving and receiving dictates that you should strike a balance between giving help and requesting it. Overly generous givers help too much. As a result, they suffer impaired productivity, generosity burnout, or worse. Selfish takers frequently ask but neglect the obligation to help and their reputation suffers. Lone wolves are the worst off. They don't participate in the cycle of giving and receiving at all. Those who are well regarded and the most productive, freely help others and also freely ask for help when they need it. These giver requesters are esteemed for their generosity and get the inflow of resources they need to achieve superior performance. Asking for what we need doesn't come easily for most of us. Asking is a behavior that must be learned. It requires three steps, determining your goals and needs, translating needs into well formulated requests and figuring out whom and how to ask.

Shellye ([17:41](#)):

You can use one or all three of these methods to determine your goals and needs, quick start goal setting and visioning. Once you've identified your needs, use smart, specific, meaningful, and action-oriented, realistic and time bound criteria to translate those needs into effective requests. Figuring out who to ask requires you to know who knows what and who knows who. When you don't, you can consult directories, profiles or bios and reach out to a dormant tie or try to find secondary contacts to help you. Finally, you can broadcast request to groups, either in person or via social media and social networking sites. And remember that rejection is just an opinion and opinions change. In other words, you can find ways to turn a "no" into a "yes".

MBS ([18:36](#)):

I love it. Thank you, Shellye. One of my favorite sayings is an adult to adult relationship is being able to ask for what you want, knowing that the answer



may be no. So it feels like you're bringing that. In those two pages, Shellye, what's the kernel of truth there for you?

Shellye ([18:56](#)):

The kernel of truth is that it goes back to giving and receiving. If you want help from others, you need to give it. It is in that. It is a two-way street. And it's not a quid pro quo. It's not a, "Okay, Michael. I'll do this for you, but then, you better do something for me." That's not giving and receiving. That's a deal. What you just made is an agreement.

MBS ([19:18](#)):

Right?

Shellye ([19:18](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([19:18](#)):

Very different. Giving is to give freely so that you can later ask freely. So that's one and two, this is hard. It's hard to ask for help. Back to being vulnerable or showing that you don't know everything or whatever it might be. And so acknowledges, "Hey, it's hard, but there are ways to do it that can be comfortable."

MBS ([19:43](#)):

What's the boldest ask you've made?

Shellye ([19:45](#)):

Well, the boldest ask I made is I was interviewing for a job to be the chief marketing office and needed to be a sales at this company. And I was living in Dallas and the company was based in Silicon Valley. And I could tell they were getting close. They were making me the offer. We're starting to negotiate the



offer. Okay, great. We've got it all negotiated. They're going to move me and my family, the whole bit. And then I said, one of the objectives the CEO has is for me to hit the ground running fast. We need to make a fast change, fast growth, fast, blah, blah. So the best way for me to be the most effective is for the company to hire my current assistant.

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

Oh nice.

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

Because she knows me. She knows all about me. I'll be right, ready to go, da, da, da, da. She lives in Dallas too and so does her family. So I want you to hire her and move her and her family to Silicon Valley.

MBS ([20:34](#)):

Wow. That's-

Shellye ([20:35](#)):

That was my boldest ask.

MBS ([20:37](#)):

That is a bold ask. Shellye, it feels like in the pages you read, there are these different elements to it. One is knowing what you want. One is making the request, but the third is knowing of whom to ask to make the request. And it feels to me that there's a degree of short term pain, which is having the coverage to make the ask. But actually in some ways the bigger things to try and figure out are, first of all, what do you want and secondly, "Who do I ask?" Let me start with the final piece first. How do you nurture your ecosystem So you've got the right people to ask? How do you figure out who to make the request of?



Shellye ([21:24](#)):

Well, you don't always have within your network, the right person to ask. Can I give you an example?

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

Please.

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

I took over a very troubled company called Zaplet at the time. It became MetricStream. And what they were selling nobody was buying so we had to find a new value proposition. So I was trying to find a problem in the market that the technology we had could solve. Okay. How do you do that? I mean, that's a big issue. And I've got a company that's burning money, so time's a ticking. So I started. I didn't know who to ask so I asked everybody. I went and said to my board members... I said, "I'm trying to find a problem to solve. What do you see happening in the business? And then they give me their thoughts, but here's the key. Then I said, "Who else do you think I should talk to?" Because most people want to be helpful. So they'll give you somebody. Well now, you're in their network. And then, you continue to do the same thing. You talked to them. "Well, who else do you think I should talk...

Shellye ([22:24](#)):

Anyway. So as a result, I've ultimately got to a guy by the name of Roger McNamee. You may know that name too. He's a lawyer in Silicon Valley. Very forward thinking. He's the one who first talked to me about the issue of risk and compliance management. And I was like, "Oh, okay." And then I dug into that and did some more. But if I had just relied on who I knew, I might not have gotten there. So it doesn't matter that you don't have your immediate network.



MBS ([22:49](#)):

So here's a question. How do you nurture the shamelessness to keep asking for help like that? And I'm quite big on shamelessness that I feel like I'm shameless about asking for stuff. I'm like, "I've got nothing to lose here," or I'm going to get... If the worst I get is a "no," I'm pretty much the same person and I'm in the same position I'm already am. I'm wondering how you build up that capacity to keep asking when people go, "I don't know an answer. Don't want to talk to you." And how do you keep going after the first sting of rejection?

Shellye ([23:23](#)):

Well, here's the key. You don't have to stick with the same people. So I don't badger people. So I mean, if people are like, "I don't know. I can't figure out how to help you." Okay. Move on or at least you try to get the... So I understand you don't know, but is there anyone that you are familiar with that you think might have a better perspective. And, see, most people want to appear intelligent. And therefore, they're going to try to give you something if you ask them in a way in which you're tying it to there. So the way you do it is you compliment them. "Michael, you know so much about this business of podcasts. Can you think of someone in this industry that you know that I might talk to, to just get blah, blah, blah." Now, if you tell me no, what you've just done is you've just diminished my view of you. So you're not going to say no.

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

That's true. And I have a particularly fragile male ego. So I'm particularly susceptible to this sort of stuff. I'm desperate to appear smart in front of Shellye. So I'll say anything at this time. So there is that ability to kind of keep moving and keep asking. I am wondering, though, is there something about how you look after and nurture your network, your relationship? Is there something there that you've got a point of view on or some wisdom to share?



Shellye ([24:41](#)):

Yes. I am fortunate in that I have a very strong network. But it doesn't just happen because, first, you have to define what a network is. I'm not talking about the number of contacts in my phone. To me, that's not a network. To me, a network are the people around you who will do something for you when it's not convenient.

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

That's nice.

Shellye ([25:05](#)):

Right?

MBS ([25:05](#)):

Yeah.

Shellye ([25:05](#)):

To me, that's a real network. Now, to build that, it means you have to have a relationship. You have to have a relationship. Because otherwise, why would I do something for you, when it's not convenient? So building relationships are something you have to nurture and work on. And how do you do it? To me, it's a combination of back to the caring, showing you care. It's reaching out to people, "Hey, we haven't connected in a while. Was thinking about you." I'll send people articles. I'll read something that might say, "This made me think of you." Blah, blah. You send it off. I do communications. I'll do reach out. I do invitations to events and to things that are going on. I mean, it's all about showing you care and I genuinely do. The good news for me is I genuinely like people.

MBS ([25:52](#)):

That's helpful.



Shellye ([25:53](#)):

It is helpful.

MBS ([25:53](#)):

Yeah. I think probably my problem is I don't like people enough. Maybe that's another story. Shellye, what about the other part of the equation? So we've got knowing who to ask. We've got making the ask. But the start of that is that you have to figure out what you want. What's at the heart of the request? Because if you ask for the wrong thing, or you ask for trivial things, you're using up relationship equity. Is there a process you've got for figuring out what's the request you want to make?

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

The way I've approached just about everything in life, Michael, is I'm very goal-oriented. So it's always a matter of, "Okay, what is it I'm trying to," and then fill in the blank, to do, to create, to achieve, something. And then I say, "Okay, so what has to be true for that to happen?"

MBS ([26:47](#)):

Right.

Shellye ([26:47](#)):

So for instance, we'll go back to the CEO problem. We need to save this company. What needs to be true? I need to have a product that people want to buy. So how does that happen? What has to be true for that to happen? Well, to have a product you want to buy, I've got to be solving a real problem and effect. So you ask yourself questions. What has to be true in order to achieve what you want to achieve? And then how do I make it true? And then, how do you make it true are all the steps. So once you understand the steps, now, you know what you need to ask for.



MBS ([27:22](#)):

Nice. I mean, I learned that question what needs to be true for this to happen from Roger Martin, I think. And it's such a nice, strategic question because it puts you into the future. And it doesn't say, "Is this a good or a bad idea?" It just says, "What needs to be true?" And then you can kind of figure out is there a path back to where you are now? Or actually, is there not a path back? And either way, that's a good outcome.

Shellye ([27:45](#)):

Exactly right.

MBS ([27:48](#)):

Shellye, your book is called Unapologetically Ambitious, take risk, break barriers, and create success on your own terms. Speak to me about the word unapologetic. It's a powerful word.

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

It is a powerful word. It's interesting because I had the entire book written and I had no title.

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

I've been there. I've written five or six books and I'm like, "This title thing is killing me."

Shellye ([28:11](#)):

Exactly. Exactly. I was like, "Okay." I knew I wanted the word ambition or ambitious or something in it because too many times in my career, and I know the career of others, people are told they're ambitious. And it's not meant as a compliment, which to me is ridiculous because all ambition means is there's something that you are striving for to achieve in the future. Everybody should something you're trying to achieve.



Shellye ([28:34](#)):

So at any rate, so I knew I had that. But I couldn't just call it Ambition. And then I was having a conversation with a group of friends, all women, and we got this whole thing about apologizing. And I said, "I believe women are raised from birth to apologize." I mean, my husband would step on my foot and I'd say, "I'm sorry." He didn't. I did. Why? Because my foot's in the way. That's ridiculous. It's just like this knee-jerk reaction. And I remember telling him. I was like, "Babe, you never apologize." And he's like, "What are you talking about? I apologize all the time." I'm like, "No, you don't." And we went back and forth and I said, "Listen. Count when you've apologized." He said, "Shellye, I apologize every time I do something intentionally wrong." Notice that definition intentionally wrong. Whereas I apologize just to make people feel better. It had nothing do with me.

Shellye ([29:25](#)):

So it's like, "Whoa." And we were talking about it. I said, "We've got to stop apologizing because everybody thinks we really are sorry for everything that happens and we're responsible." And that's when it hit me. I'm like, "you know what?" That's it. Unapologetically Ambitious. We all deserve to be ambitious and no one should have to apologize for it."

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

What do you see people apologizing for, when they're dancing with their own ambition?

Shellye ([29:53](#)):

Oh my goodness. Apologize for a lot of things. I see people apologizing for who they are, which is the one that really bothers me. And when I say who they are, I mean, if they might have an accent or might come from a different place, whatever. They say, "Oh, apologies for my accent," or apologies for this or... It's



like, no, that's who you are. It's made you who you are. It's gotten you to this point. Do not apologize for who you are.

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

And then two, I see people apologizing for things that happen that aren't even in their control or for their behavior. I'm sorry for this or I'm sorry for that. I'm sorry for... And when you say it too much, it diminishes you. It makes you feel like what you're saying is, "I don't belong and I'm sorry for standing here." And that's not what they mean. So this apologizing thing, we need to figure out different ways, especially for women. Because like I said, we're almost raised to do this. But we've got to figure out different ways to communicate, "But it's okay to make mistakes. It is okay for you to step forward. It's okay for you to raise your hand." "I'm sorry. I just had a comment." No, don't say you're sorry because you have to comment.

MBS ([31:06](#)):

Of course, if you move across the border up north to Canada where, where I'm based, we all apologize for everything all the time as well. It's one of our national characteristics. So there's that. Shellye, in your subtitle, you talk about creating success on your own terms. And one of the challenges with ambition is climbing the wrong mountain. It's like that saying, "I got to the top of the ladder and it wasn't the ladder I wanted to climb." But you become ambitious for other people's definitions of success rather than your 'own definition and your own terms. How do you untangle what's expected or hoped for you and how do you find what really matters to you?

Shellye ([31:54](#)):

Yeah. No. You know what? This is such a deep question because I think it's at the heart of a lot of this. As I was defining what I wanted, early, it was simple and then things evolve. For all of us, what we want, I think, evolves. But early, it was simple. It's like, "I want to keep my thermostat at 72 degrees so how much



money do I need to make," that kind of thing. And then evolved to, "Okay, I want a career, but I also want to get married. I want children." So then those became goals that I had. And then as you have children and things, "Okay. I want my children to grow up to be independent and confident and caring people." I mean, so I think what you want evolves. But what I try to tell people is think about it at the most basic level.

MBS ([32:41](#)):

Right.

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

I think about it at the most basic level, because if you define it at the basic level, then there might be different ways to actually achieve it. Versus if you just hold off at a very high level, "Okay. It's this," well, the this can change in time. And if you're always going after it, but you don't have the foundation underneath, you're right. You end up at the top of a ladder, but there's nobody holding the bottom. So that's what I encourage people to do. Just think basics. What do you want?

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

And when you say basics, you mean just kind of big foundational blocks, like, "I do want kids," or, "I don't want kids" or something more specific than that?

Shellye ([33:17](#)):

Yeah. Or it can also be, for instance, as I evolved through, I wanted to be able to positively impact people. I consider that kind of a basic thing. Everybody said what they want. I'm not a mercenary. So I've never been driven by the biggest dollar. Some people are. What's most important to them is what their bank statement or investment portfolio says? That's the most important of what they're driving to. So figure out what's really important to you and it's okay if that's what it is. I mean, we're all driven differently. So I'm not downplaying



people, but figure out what it really is for you so that at the end of the day, no matter what happens... Because trust me. There are going to be times when things go great and there are going to be times when things just are terrible. But if you don't have that foundation, it's really hard to keep bouncing back.

MBS ([34:10](#)):

What's the price you pay for ambition?

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

One is being vulnerable. I talked about that because you have to be vulnerable to get it. So if you're vulnerable, then one of the prices you pay is you're kind of open to attack in some ways. Things have all that stuff so that's one price you pay. Another price you pay is making hard choices. Notice, I don't say sacrifices. I cannot stand that term sacrifice. I feel a sacrifice is something you do completely for someone else. I sacrifice myself for you. And when you do that, I believe you put way too much pressure on the person that you sacrificed for because they can never be thankful enough or grateful enough or appreciate enough. Because all that you did for them. No. No, no. You own the choices. You own the decisions. And a lot of times, they're hard but you have to own them. So I see that as another price you pay.

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

Now, I had a chance to pre-read Susan Kane's new book called Bittersweet. And one of the things I like about it is it's reoriented me to the word sacrifice because the etymology of that is to make sacred. And I hadn't thought of that before, but that this is an act that in the act, I'm making something sacred between us. And I'm now thinking about sacrifice in a new and different way. Shellye, this has been such a lovely conversation. Thank you. As a final question, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between you and me?



Shellye ([35:48](#)):

Oh my goodness. In the time we've spent, we only scratched the surface on so many things. I guess the big thing is, on the whole, all you have to do is ask. If you have aspirations, if you have things that you are trying to do, achieve or to impact, make sure other people know about it so they can actually help you. If you keep it a secret, if you keep it a secret, people don't know how to help. And you'd be surprised. Most people want to be helpful if they can.

MBS ([36:24](#)):

One thing this conversation has prompted for me is the question, "Well, how do I balance vulnerability and ambition? Well, if I have one, is it true that I can't have the other?" But where I want to go is actually that throwaway line from Shellye's around learn to take off her armor. Now, I can think of three key pieces of armor. There's your helmet, protecting your head. Let's think of it as protecting your ideas. There's your breast plate, protecting your heart. So maybe that's protecting your sense of self. And then there, there are gloves. They're kind of the shin pads protecting your legs and your ability, let's say, to act and to move.

MBS ([37:07](#)):

So let's assume that you and I, we're all wearing armor. Which of that armor is actually helpful for you right now? What's helpful to protect? And here, of course, is the question I'm really wrestling with, which piece might it be time to remove, to become more open and vulnerable, more open, say, to sharing your ideas or testing your ideas out in public, kind of showing them into the sunlight? More vulnerable, more courageous, perhaps around collaborating with others. One of the great challenges to a sense of self is meeting other people and interacting with other people. Or maybe there's something about taking some risk, being more vulnerable, more open around what do you do? What do you experiment? What do you test? How do you run small experiments to see what might work?



MBS ([37:53](#)):

If you enjoyed my conversation with Shellye, I've got a couple of other interviews to suggest from the 2 Pages series you might enjoy. Arthur Brooks, he put a book out start of the year called From Strength to Strength. And it's really about, and this is the name of our interview, in search of purpose. How do you find that, particularly, if you're in that second half of your life, like I am? So welcome. And then my friend, Liz Wiseman. My interview with her is called How to Thrive. She's got a great new book called Impact Players. And it's really about what does it take to be one of those people who's really making a difference in the work and in the life that you have? If you'd like more of Shellye, well then, you can definitely check her out at her website and we'll put this in the notes, of course. But her website is Shellye Archambeau.

MBS ([38:43](#)):

All of those words are slightly tricky to spell. So I'll spell them for you. S-H-E-L-L-Y-E. That's not the usual order, Y-E. S-H-E-L-L-Y-E A-R-C-H-A-M-B-E-A-U, Shellye Archambeau. Thank you for listening. We really appreciate it. Thank you for giving it some love. We've got quite a lot of reviews now, which is so nice to see and so appreciated. If you're willing to give us score on the platform in which you listen, some stars or some nice words, appreciate that. The podcast grows by word of mouth. So if this interview struck a chord for you and you're thinking, "Hey, that person in my life should know about it," passing that interview on with your recommendation means a great deal. So thank you for that. You're awesome. And you're doing great.