



Join our free membership site, The Duke Humfrey's, and get access to full transcripts, past episodes, exclusive downloads and more.

You'll find it all at www.MBS.works/podcast

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

I am a thoroughly charming, man. I mean, I'm sure you already thought that, but just in case you weren't entirely certain, let me reassure you. I am absolutely delightful. A dash of self-deprecation, a witty remark or two, a certain panache and honestly hunger for the spotlight. I mean, I am the complete package. Now, first of all, let's just say this is a very, very, very optimistic view of who I am, even for me, but it's not entirely untrue. And there is a price I pay for being charming, and it's this. It's the dark side. I am slippery. I am evasive. I'm hard to pin down. I do a great job at misdirection, so no one's looking at the mess and the confusion.

([00:53](#)):

And it means that one of the great gifts of my life are the people who are on my side, but not likely to fall for my whole stick. They smile knowingly. They sidestep my attempted charm and then they bring me back to what matters.



And here I'm thinking of my wife, Marcella, my coach of many years, Ernest, and a few other people. So let me ask you, do you have people who in the nicest possible way hold you to be the very best person you can be and not let you wriggle out of it?

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

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Tom Weise is the co-founder of Studio/E, and he has spent the past few decades designing tools and teaching people how to explore, launch, and navigate their lives and businesses. But prior to his work at Studio/E, Tom had a bit of a wild streak before doing a complete 180.

Tom [\(01:57\)](#):

I started out as kind of a young, crazy person, and I decided to get really serious about life. I went to law school and I started to do a lot of things I should do. And I was checking those should do's off the list. Fortunately, I meant some mentors along the way who said you should really do what you must do.

MBS [\(02:19\)](#):

Should versus must, focusing on a calling rather than a checklist, these are fundamental life skills. Now, one of Tom's mentors, the one who had the greatest impact on him was Jack Sell. And they did not hit it off at first.

Tom [\(02:36\)](#):

He was like a teacher you'd have at university that you go, "Okay, this is going to be a problem." This guy is serious and he's stoic and he's demanding. And he's very calm about all of these things. And he's very unyielding. So I'm like, I think my first meeting was more like, "This has been an interesting experience. I don't think this will last."



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

But it did last for now on 30 years. In fact, Tom met with Jack monthly for 25 of those years. I mean, what do you even talk about for 300 or more meetings?

Tom ([03:14](#)):

He'd ask me a very simple question. Every time we met, the same question. I know this sounds incredibly boring. He'd say, "Good morning, Tom." I'd say, "Hi, Jack." "What's your top three?" I go, "What's my top three?" And what he wanted to know is what my three priorities were. What was the most important things I should work on for that month? And he was relentless, because I'm usually a top 100 guy. I have 100 things that I... You know what I mean?

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

Yes. SOS, the shiny object syndrome. I recognize this. I'm sticking my hand up in the air. And I have to say for me, the ability I've found which is creating focus from my many, many distractions, turns out to be one of those learned disciplines that has driven some of the success that I've had. And you know what? It also seems to me that Tom and I are kindred spirits in our need for people who can resist our charm and see through our BS.

Tom ([04:09](#)):

I would start blithering on about why I didn't do something that was on my list in the prior month. And he would listen very calmly, very politely. He was an incredibly civil person. And eventually he just say, "Stop it, stop it."

MBS ([04:26](#)):

That's funny.

Tom ([04:27](#)):

"Let's come back to what we're talking about, because you are avoiding this subject."



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

Right. Right.

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

And it was that repetition, that habitual pattern that actually transformed me remarkably. It gave me the courage to leave... I was in a very comfortable situation with my law practice, and it gave me the courage to step out and try exploratory leadership, create a firm around that, invest in things and do things. It's truly amazing, but I honestly could not have done that without him. And I wouldn't have met you without him. I mean, that's the power of an amazing mentor. It expands your courage to reach out to people that you admire. I've listened to your podcast. It's great, by the way.

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

Thank you.

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

And when you were talking with Seth Godin, you had given the story about how you reached out to Seth Godin, you didn't know him and he kind of blessed your work, your book.

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

That's right.

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

How powerful that was.

MBS ([05:26](#)):

Yeah.



Tom ([05:26](#)):

I did the same thing to you. I was sitting in my sauna in 2011, reflecting on something. I read something that you wrote and I'm like, "Who is this guy?" Like, "I need to talk to this guy right now." And I thought, "Well, maybe I should get dressed and actually take a shower."

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

Right.

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

So I had the courage because I told Jack about this and he goes, "Well, you should just contact him." And I would never do that on my own. I think, "Well, I don't know who this guy is." Anyway, so I did that and you responded and it's-

MBS ([05:57](#)):

That was great.

Tom ([05:57](#)):

... created a marvelous relationship. We have a mile marker relationship where we're checking every two to three years, and it's been awesome to go through life.

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

I agree. What was the hardest lesson you had to learn with Jack?

Tom ([06:17](#)):

Oh, there's a few. One, about my kids, like you can't control their destiny.

MBS ([06:22](#)):

Right.



Tom ([06:24](#)):

And then I had to learn that about so many other things, which is hard, because I was trying to control a lot of other people's destinies. That was a valuable lesson, a very painful one. You can be their guide, but they have to... You can give them the instrument, but they got to play.

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

Right. Right.

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

And so that was something. And then the other thing I learned from him is it's really simple, it's just be kind and work hard.

MBS ([06:51](#)):

Nice.

Tom ([06:52](#)):

And kindness is kind of seems to be alluding a lot of behavior these days.

MBS ([06:59](#)):

That is very true. Tom, you've put exploration at the heart of what you believe about leadership and what you teach about leadership. Do you remember when you were first called to explore?

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

Well, I was always an explorer from a young child. I think most people are. And then you get into these systems that we've created that are more about exploitation and execution, and it kind of gets beat out of you. And you kind of say, well, exploration is for maybe when I retire or maybe for super rich people or whatever.



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

Right.

Tom ([07:38](#)):

But for me, I have to work here in the mine. I have to be shoveling coal. I have to actually execute. I have to do all these things. And so I think it left me for a while as I was in my early 20s. And there was a certain restlessness that comes to I think most people when they're not exploring. Like if you listen to all your past... I've listened to most of the episodes of your podcast. The word explore comes up almost in every talk. And I think it's an innate desire of all humans to explore. But you can get caught in a lot of systems that don't honor it or don't allow it because of the time and the focus on execution. Well, I did that hard in my 30s and on up.

MBS ([08:28](#)):

Yeah. How did you rekindle that spirit, Tom? Because I agree with you, I think kids naturally are just like, "Okay. Wherever the boundary is, I'm going to go over that boundary." And then there's just a relentlessness around why you're required to conform to manage a complicated life. And you've got obligations that you didn't have when you were a kid. And you've got expectations that are sometimes internally driven and sometimes externally created. How was the call to explore differently when you were in your 30s? What does it sound like?

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

I just realized, I was not... I don't even know if the word's happy. It's more like, I didn't think I was on a meaningful path. I think I was on a path where I could just acquire a lot of stuff.

MBS ([09:23](#)):

[inaudible 00:09:23].



Tom ([09:26](#)):

I'm not saying stuff isn't good, but once you get some stuff, you're like, "I got a lot of stuff. Who cares?" David Brooks has it really well laid out in his Second Mountain book. If you read that, it's like, you kind of get to that little mountain you go, "Okay. There really is nothing up here." I mean, it's not what I thought it would be. And that restlessness was really ringing hard in me. And because I had mentors, because they made me courageous, I was still afraid. I was afraid to leave the complete execution path.

([10:00](#)):

And I'm not saying don't execute, just run around and explore and act like life is burning, man. I'm just saying, it's like a portfolio. It's like, yeah, it's execute 70% of the time. And 20% of the time innovate, so you become a better executor. But 10% of that time should be exploration. It's like the sprinkles on an ice cream cone. It's that. It's that to die. And that's what I came across. And I don't know, it almost came to me through different books and mentors. But it's really driven me hard. It's actually put me on a quest since that time.

MBS ([10:38](#)):

Tell me what you are choosing to read for us today, Tom.

Tom ([10:42](#)):

Oh, this was so easy. People usually have a hard time with what to pick.

MBS ([10:50](#)):

They do. It's an interesting wrestle. They're like, even when they can figure out the book, they then have to figure out the two pages. But I mean, I've heard of this author and quite frankly, he may be overrated but we'll go with it nonetheless.



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

Well, he's dead sexy. We know that. So as I said in earlier, I was sitting in my sauna, I read this thing. So I read this story and I was struggling at the time. I needed one piece to this exploratory leadership course that I was creating in 2011. And this one piece I could not figure out. It was driving me insane. So I go into my sauna. In my sauna, I usually have books that are all short stories, because I can only stay in there for 15 or 20 minutes or else I'll pass out. Right? So I'm pretty sweaty at this time.

([11:37](#)):

I remember this distinctly. In fact, I still have the book. It's just like, looks like it's wet and [inaudible 00:11:43], warped. And I picked it up. I opened it up and I had picked up this book, it's called End Malaria. And I didn't know anything about it. I just thought it had a cool cover and I liked it. I opened up to what I want to read for you today. It's called I'm Scarred, and it's actually by you.

MBS ([12:02](#)):

It is. That's right.

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

Michael Bungay Stanier. What was so interesting, I did reach out to you after this, and I said you have thousands of people reached out to you about this and you go, "No."

MBS ([12:17](#)):

Exactly. I mean this project, just as an aside, I did in 2011 in partnership with Seth Godin, that I kind of created this idea, which is we would make a book that was all about raising money for Malaria No More. And we raised \$400,000 or thereabouts and sold a bunch. And the book got to number two or maybe number one on Amazon [inaudible 00:12:37], which was exciting. But I'm a big believer in the saying, "It's amazing what you can do if you don't care who gets



the credit." But I didn't really get any credit for this book. And there's one part of me was like, "Yeah, I wouldn't mind a little bit of spotlight or a little bit hazarding around that." So you ringing me up and going, "The book was great, and this chapter you wrote was particularly great," was meaningful for me.

Tom ([13:01](#)):

Well, I'll tell you this. So this is a kind of wisdom to all authors out there. I've personally given this story to over, I mean by hand, 1500 amazing leaders. So sometimes, you don't feel that as the author. You never really know the impact you're having.

MBS ([13:22](#)):

That is true.

Tom ([13:22](#)):

And I would just say this has had profound impact by my own hand with thousands of people. And so-

MBS ([13:28](#)):

Thank you, Tom.

Tom ([13:29](#)):

... I would recommend it to anyone too. I went and checked before we talked, it is still available. It's an amazing book, but I'd love to read it. I have an abridged version because I'm trying to stick by the rules. That's another thing Jack taught me, try to honor people's rules.

MBS ([13:44](#)):

Perfect. Well, the rules are a bit loosey-goosey for two pages, but we'll stick with what you got and we'll go with it. So Tom Weise reading from the brilliant, the



charismatic, the charming man, Michael Bungay Stanier, his essay from the End Malaria book, which I also kind of created and edited. So Tom, over to you.

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

I'm scarred. Your scars can hold you back and limit you, but there's another way to see them. A scar is a story waiting to be told. In fact, two stories. One, story of love. And it's flip side, one of fear, one of nourishment, one of diminishment. Which story you choose to tell matters a great deal. Let me show you what I mean. Here are two stories I tell myself about my cleft lip and palette. They're both equally true.

([14:47](#)):

The story of fear. My cleft lip and palate means I have a speech impediment, an oddly shaped top lip and a somewhat flattened nose. People find me disconcerting to look at. And some people see me as ugly. People don't want to talk to me because they're uncomfortable with my cleft lip. Kids, especially. I should operate behind the scenes because my speech impediment means I shouldn't be out front. If I don't talk too much, people won't notice I have a disability. Stay quiet. This is my disability.

([15:24](#)):

The story of love. My cleft lip and palate means I have a speech impediment, an oddly shaped top lip and a somewhat flattened nose. I stand out from the crowd. I'm not bland. People don't notice my speech impediment. They just accept me for who I am, especially when I do what I'm best at. When I give speeches, my unique style of speaking helps me stand out from the crowd. People find it easier to check with me because I have an obvious vulnerability. It balances me out. And for some people I can be a role model for overcoming disabilities. This is one source of my power. Same scars, same person, very different stories.



MBS ([16:13](#)):

That's great. I haven't read that for 10 years since I first wrote it. So I'd forgotten really what was in it. So thank you for reading that. And I like it. I think it holds up, so that's great. But enough about me. Tell me what you think about me. Yeah. What is it about that that resonated that time when you were in the sauna reading it? Why is it so powerful for you?

Tom ([16:37](#)):

Okay. So when I was done reading this, it was like I won the Primus in Rome, in the arena as a gladiator. It solved a massive problem for me. And this is what I was dealing with is like, I understand what mindset is. You know fixed mindset, open mindset, but how do I get people to actually take action around that? Not only acknowledging what it is or being aware of what it is, how can I get people to take action? And so when I read this, that made me think of Joseph Campbell's amazing one-liner, "The privilege of a lifetime is being who you are."

MBS ([17:14](#)):

Oh, I love that.

Tom ([17:14](#)):

So I combined those things and I said okay, I'm teaching people how... Well, I'm teaching people exploratory leadership. And that is how to basically motivate yourself and others to go into the unknown with clarity and confidence, to discover more possibility. Now, most people are frightened to do that. They need the right mindset. So if you're telling yourself a default story of fear, failure, everything that holds you back, things that aren't daunting, right? You're not going to explore very much. But if you can pick a different story, a story of courage, a story of love, you have actually the power.



(17:53):

I mean, so it's a mindset story for me. So I converted the ancient formula from the stoics of events plus response equals outcome to a mindset formula from this, and it's events plus the stories you decided to tell equals the outcome. And we're not talking fake stories. Like in this story, they're both true. It's just which story are you going to tell? If you didn't tell a story of love, I wouldn't be talking to you and you prop right now and you probably wouldn't be wearing that shirt.

MBS (18:23):

I don't know. I do like a good shirt. I may still be wearing the shirt, but we probably wouldn't be talking. You're reminding me of my friend, Eric Zimmer's podcast called Two Wolves, which is based on that story, which I'm sure you've heard, which is we have two wolves inside us fighting and then which one wins, the one you feed. So it's a similar piece, which is like, there's you always have these things competing, polarities about who you are. Which one wins is by the one which you nourish. The one by which you don't, under... The one that is not the one you starve, but the one that you feed. So I love that.

Tom (19:00):

Completely.

MBS (19:03):

What's a scar that's become a source of strength for you?

Tom (19:11):

I have so many, but I think a big scar that I have that has really directed a lot of my behavior is, one time I was making a presentation to some very serious CFO type people and I showed up with just pictures and they're emotional pictures. And I was with my friend/co-author, Nate Garvis, and we showed all these emotional pictures about this concept that we were trying to enroll them in. And they were not moved. Nate and I were crying. We thought it was amazing.



MBS ([19:58](#)):

Right.

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

It was humiliating. It didn't go well. And it made me afraid to present people going forward for a while. And then I realized, no, you just have to speak their language. These people wanted facts. They wanted some logic. Some people like emotion. Some people like logic. Some people like to know how others are included. Some people like action. Well, include all four of those in everything you do and then you're going to be an effective presenter. But having a presentation literally combust in front of you, it's a scar. When I think of it right now, I'm getting sweaty. I mean-

MBS ([20:42](#)):

Yeah, I see that. What were the two stories? That you had that experience and now you've got two stories that are possible to tell. You've told us a little bit about what it tells you about other people, which is like some people just need to hear stories in different ways, but I'm wondering what the stories are that you tell about yourself in that situation.

Tom ([21:02](#)):

The first story is a story of failure. I am not good at doing presentations. I should actually have business development people do that. I shouldn't do that. And it's a story of, I mean, basically being stuck, that's something I can't do. I need to move on from that. The other story that is more powerful is now I know what to do. I actually have proof of what to do. I need to speak colorfully. I need to speak 360. And I know that from firsthand experience. A lot of people don't know that. They speak in what moves them, not in what will enroll all others. And so that's the story there. But there's thousands of those within me. Every time I make a mistake, I'm like, how can I reframe that not falsely, but how can I reframe that to create a current means? An asset, and I have a lot of assets.



MBS ([22:03](#)):

I hear you on that one. Because I go, I'm like, "Oh, so many stories, so many scars." Tom, you are you're in the world of teaching and teaching leadership and teaching the ability to explore. If having scars and knowing the stories of your scar is so important, how do you help people recognize or even name their scars? Because sometimes people are like, "I don't want to know it. I don't want to name it. I don't want to see it. I want to keep it hidden." How do you give people the courage to say here's my scar, let me tell you about it?

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

Well, I think there's many ways to do it. The way we've done it successfully is we create peer-to-peer groups, and they're safe. And what I mean by safe group is your spouse isn't in there, your boss isn't in there. I mean, those people have bias and they want you to be a certain way. And they want a certain outcome. If you put people together that are not kind of in your direct orbit, they can be very safe. Then you actually develop some trust with them. And so we develop trust with individuals by not asking about their labels or their titles. We ask them where they grew up. We ask them what their favorite band is in high school. We ask them all sorts of questions that are more humanity-based, more otherness of the other questions. They get comfortable really fast.

([23:28](#)):

Then ironically, we give them your article. They read that and we sit in a circle. So we're all facing each other. So there's no separation. And we'll just say, what are your scars? And we've done that for a decade. And there's always an awkward silence.

MBS ([23:50](#)):

Exactly.



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

And if you just sit there in the silence, some brave soul will eventually share. And when one shares, it goes like that much.

MBS ([23:59](#)):

Right. Yeah.

Tom ([24:01](#)):

Because there's almost a community expectation of vulnerability because someone went first, and that's how you can share it. And as you've also so eloquently equipped in the past, wisdom enters through the scar, and as those people share, they really can recognize this is some deep wisdom we're getting, because it's coming through experience from amazing people that I would think are scarless. But everyone has scars.

MBS ([24:31](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, that's true. I think if we talked about leadership and how you teach it, we'd spend a lot of time kind of rigorously agreeing with each other because I think we see it in a similar way. But I'm wondering, what are the myths of leadership that drive you nuts? What are you trying to disprove in the way that you think about leadership?

Tom ([25:00](#)):

Some people think leadership is for... It's just for some people. Like that person's a leader. I'm not a leader. I'm a doer. And I think everyone has to lead themselves. So I think leadership is for everyone. Now, that doesn't mean... Some people don't lead teams and some people don't lead organizations. There are deeper levels of it. But self-leadership is the most important thing. Because if you can't lead yourself, you have a lot of homework to do. I mean, you have a lot of stuff to work on.



MBS ([25:30](#)):

What do you mean by self-leadership? Because it's one of those things that I intuitively nod my head to and then I'm like, "Wait, wait a sec. If I'm leading a team, I've got followers." And there's that great thing, which is like, you're not a leader unless you have some people who are following you. But when you're a self-leadership, who's following what?

Tom ([25:49](#)):

You're following a vision that you desire for your life.

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

That's nice.

Tom ([25:54](#)):

So you create a vision in your head of what you want to do or where you want to go, and then you'll hold yourself accountable to that vision. That is self-leadership. Just having the vision and not going there is not leadership. That's just being a visionary. And so that's how I would describe it in a nutshell. And what we teach by the way, just so we have context, is like... Do you guys have Lowe's Home Improvement stores in Canada?

MBS ([26:20](#)):

Well, I think so. And we certainly have the equivalent of that. So yeah,-

Tom ([26:26](#)):

This of this as-

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

Basically a big-box store, lots of wood, lots of tools, lots of furniture, patio furniture.



Tom ([26:32](#)):

So you got it. So if Lowe's was a leadership development store or your home improvement was a leadership development store, there's thousands of tools for leaders. What we teach, exploratory leadership is one end cap in that massive store. Now, it's a linchpin skill because it would be akin to not having a hammer in your toolbox, because everyone needs to know how to navigate change and create possibility. But it's very small. So our universe is small, but how we do teach it is under that premise that you actually need to be able to lead yourself first. And another myth of leadership is that there's a way, like there's one way. And I have been in peer-to-peer group since 1989, very long time. And people are remarkably different. They're like kids. Everyone is different with their style. And there is no one way.

MBS ([27:36](#)):

Right.

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

How about you? What are some of the myths you see in leadership?

MBS ([27:47](#)):

I think this is probably saying the same thing as you, but in slightly different words. But one of the things that I feel as the heaviest burden of a leader is that you need to know what's going on. Whereas, I do think part of what leadership is it's just naming what reality is, which is quite different from knowing what's going on. It's like, I think we know this. I think we don't know this. I think this is how we're feeling. I think this is how I'm feeling. And the ability to name what's going on, I think is helpful. And in fact, it leads me to the question I want to ask you this, which is when I think of Studio/E, your exploratory leadership firm, and you've got kind of three core words it's built on; explore, launch, and navigate.



Tom ([28:31](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([28:31](#)):

And there you go. You're wearing the t-shirt, and you've got the E on the baseball cap. But I think that looks to me like an Elton John baseball cap rather than-

Tom ([28:38](#)):

It is.

MBS ([28:39](#)):

... a Studio/E. There we go. I recognized that.

Tom ([28:39](#)):

Exactly.

MBS ([28:42](#)):

That little bit of glitter there.

Tom ([28:44](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([28:46](#)):

What do you mean by navigate? And what's essential to being able to navigate?

Tom ([28:54](#)):

Wow. Okay. So even in your book where you say, "Hey, put a verb against your goal." These are our verbs, basically; explore new possibility, launch new and innovative ideas, and navigate change. So what the navigate is, it's really a process of after you've done something, you reflect on what's happened and



that's how you navigate. So it comes back to your leadership thing where leaders need to know what's going on. We teach people to deal with the unknown, and when you're in the unknown, you don't know what's going on until you take action.

MBS ([29:31](#)):

Right. I love that.

Tom ([29:34](#)):

So we have-

MBS ([29:34](#)):

Say that again for me. Can you just say that again for me?

Tom ([29:36](#)):

Yeah. Well, when you're in the unknown, you don't know what's going on, unless you take some action.

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

That's great.

Tom ([29:42](#)):

So let me explain that. For example, we give a challenge to leaders. We put them in a kind of metaphorical boardroom. We walk in and we say, "Here's the challenge." We give them the outcome. And the outcome is to count numbers in a numerical sequence, one at a time. And we say, "How you do it is outside this door," okay, "but you only have one minute to do it, but you have three tries." And they're like, "Okay."

MBS ([30:10](#)):

Right.



Tom ([30:10](#)):

And we say, "You only have 15 minutes to figure this whole thing out in total." Some CEOs will sit in there for the whole 15 minutes trying to figure out how to win that challenge, where all you have to do is go outside, see what is there. And then come back in and basically reflect on what you saw. And then you can do it right away.

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

Right.

Tom ([30:30](#)):

But they don't know what's going on and they go into solve mode immediately, and some never go out of the boardroom.

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

Right.

Tom ([30:37](#)):

That's what we mean by navigate. Navigate. After you've taken action, reflect on what you've learned and basically pivot to another MVP. You can't think your way into a new way of acting in the unknown. You have to act your way into a new way of thinking. And it's a totally different way of being, because we're not trained that way.

MBS ([30:59](#)):

Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it? I find myself even today, occasionally in conversations with somebody where we're both trying to figure out something where we have basically no data points. So it's a hypothesis built on a hypothesis, involved in another hypothesis with a hypothetical twist. And at a certain point we're like, I think we're probably going to have to just do something just to find out whether any of this is true, or whether we're just



going to vanish up our own wazoo and our kind of puff of smoke. And it's mostly the latter. So I do like that.

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

How do you guide people into finding the right balance between courage and safety? Because part of the challenge of you learn through action is sometimes action takes you over a cliff, or ends in destruction or disaster and then you lose. So I'm just curious to know how you help people find that balance between you need to survive and you also need to step into the unknown.

Tom [\(32:12\)](#):

It's critically important people feel safe because if they don't, no matter what they say, they actually won't go to the edge. They just won't. I mean, it's biological. It's not personal. It's just people-

MBS [\(32:24\)](#):

That's right. Your little amygdala at the back of your brain going, "Step away from the edge."

Tom [\(32:29\)](#):

Yes. Stay in the cave. The problem is now staying in the cave is what kills you. So we have a different thing going on, but I would say it's this. So how we provide safety is when you're going to explore, if you create really good boundaries, you can't fail. So what I mean by that is if you say, this is what I'm willing to do, this is what I'm willing not to do. That creates a pathway. And if you kind of surround that into a step or an MVP... Like in your book, you talk about Eric Ries, the step. We talk about MVP from Essentialism, which is a little different. It's minimum viable progress.

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



If you think in your mind, I'm going to explore what's the smallest amount of progress I need to make to learn something so that I can reflect on it to take better action, then I will be safe. And I actually can't even fail. For years, I was a proponent of fail fast, fail hard, fail, fail, fail. And what I recognize in working with larger corporations and people just in general, is people agree to that, but they wouldn't do it.

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

Right.

Tom ([33:37](#)):

I endorse you, person that works for me, failing. I will not fail, but you can go do that.

MBS ([33:42](#)):

Exactly. Lovely. Failing's good. You go first.

Tom ([33:45](#)):

Yeah. So what the antidote in that for being safe is just taking small little MVP steps. And if you share your boundaries, two things happen. It doesn't work and you learn something. It does work and you know what to do next. And it makes it so much having that courage then is so easy because you know there's kind of a backstop.

MBS ([34:12](#)):

Yeah, I love that. I have read Essentialism. This is the Greg McKeown book. But I've forgotten about MVP, minimal viable progress. But that's a fantastic concept, which is, what's the minimum you need to travel just to learn something? Because when you learn something, you then can stop and reorient and figure out what the next small step is going to be to make progress. And it's



just like, "You know what? I'm just accumulating learning stuff rather than needing to win or lose."

Tom ([34:42](#)):

Exactly. And it's not about winning and losing in the unknown. It's about discovering possibility. Winning and losing is for the realm of the known. And it's very important. In the unknown, it's about discovering what's possible and what's not possible. It's a different outcome. And once you understand that, you can win and lose in the known and then you can search for possibility in the unknown by just taking small steps.

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

How do you know when it's time to stop exploring, and time to start making use of the thing that you've discovered?

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

Well, ideas come in bits and pieces. So they don't come fully packaged and wrapped in a bow and delivered to you.

MBS ([35:31](#)):

Right.

Tom ([35:35](#)):

It's a piecemeal process. As you're exploring on the way and you might find a little nugget, you can bring that back to the known and you might put that in your product or your programming, your service. Great. But if you're exploring something and you start to realize this is outside the kind of zone of my purpose or the purpose of this exploration, you should stop. So the one thing we always do is say, set your purpose, have the right mindset, do it with the community because exploring alone is really hard. I mean, you need to have support. Take those MVP steps, declare action, and then reflect on what the



action produces. So you stop when you stop learning or you stop interested in it, and that's how you stop.

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

Well, speaking of stopping, let me ask you a final question. This has been great. And I know that you and I can natter on for some hours about all of this sort of stuff. So in the interest of keeping our podcast kind of roughly in line with all the other podcasts, I'm going to finish our conversation, knowing that there's more exploration that could have been done. But let me ask you my final question, which I love and I ask all the time in these interviews, which is, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said, Tom?

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

Well, I love that question because you can't actually prepare for it. Right?

MBS ([36:56](#)):

Right.

Tom ([36:56](#)):

Because you don't know what's going to be said when you're interviewing.

MBS ([36:59](#)):

Right, right.

Tom ([36:59](#)):

So a really good question. I would say this. The one thing that hasn't been said is, well, it reminds me of something that I heard from Margaret Heffernan. I know you know her.

MBS ([37:10](#)):

I do, yeah.



Tom ([37:12](#)):

So she wrote this book called Uncharted-How to Navigate the Future.

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

She's fantastic.

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

And to this great, great quote in there. I mean, it's awesome. She says, "Navigating the future, whether away from danger or towards opportunity, has to be a collective activity because no one person can see enough."

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

That's great.

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

And in this world of individualism, I would say that's not only a bad concept. It's becoming dangerous. Get into a group that supports you, whatever it is. And it can be three buddies. You can create it yourself. But I think it's so important to go through this world with trusted, safe people, helping you navigate the future you desire.

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

I started the interview with Tom talking about his great mentor, Jack, and how that relationship has been so central to helping Tom walk the best path, create the best things. But it's actually hard to find a great mentor. I mean, if you get lucky and you have one or you're finding one, wonderful. Lucky you. But for most of us, we're wondering, well how do I even identify a possible mentor? And then if you do identify one and ask them, well, they're often busy. I mean I know, I get asked occasionally and most of the time, I just have to say no, I've got too many other commitments. But Tom finished the conversation with me



talking about how navigating the future has to be a collective activity, and that earlier on in the interview that he'd been in peer groups since the late 1980s.

[\(38:49\)](#):

This is the key insight, I think. Not one person as a mentor, but gathering a range of people and holding space for collective wisdom and encouragement and magic. I mean, I know we're trying this at mbs.works. We have a membership group called The Conspiracy. And although I do a little bit of teaching there, it's really not about me. It's about the collective courage and genius of several hundred people working on stuff that matters. So find your people. In fact, here's the invitation, the call to action. What if you were the person who gathers people together? That you are the host of the people who will elevate you and make you all that you can be?

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

Thank you for listening to 2 Pages with MBS. I do appreciate you listening all the way through an episode. I hope you're enjoying some of the guests that I'm introducing, some of the great books that they're introducing. The sweetest thing for me is if you like an episode enough that you send it on to other people, that you recommended it. I'm slowly but surely growing the listener base of this podcast, and word of mouth is the very best way to get it out into the world. What also helps is little reviews. So if you're so moved to mash a button and give it a star or a thumbs up or write some words, that is deeply appreciated as well. Let me just finish, as I always do, by saying you're awesome. You're doing great.