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

Let me tell you a little bit about Bobby. So, some of you know the name, Pat Lencioni. You might have read some of his books because he's written a... He's actually not written a... He's sold a bazillion books. And if you go into airports, some of you will remember what an airport is, and the bookstores there, you'll see his books, and the five things of a team. I've forgotten all of them. Embarrassing. I've forgotten the titles of all of his books. All you need to know is Patrick Lencioni is a gifted business writer, plenty of talks, a huge influencer in this leadership space. And when I picked up Bobby's book, The Gift of Struggle, and there was a quote from Pat Lencioni on the back saying, "This is the best CEO you've never heard of." I'm like, that's a strong statement because Pat Lencioni has seen a lot of CEOs. And for him to name somebody as an extraordinary leader, that really means something.



(00:58):

So, let me formally introduce you to Bobby so you know who we've got here. He is the co-founder and CEO of Populous Group. He is a proud US army veteran. He is an unwavering champion for the underdog, and most importantly, and all pro dad to three amazing kids. Bobby is the author of *The Gift of Struggle: Life-changing Lessons bout Leading*. So Bobby, it's so nice to have you here.

Bobby (01:25):

Hail the underdogs, Michael.

MBS (01:27):

Hail the underdogs.

Bobby (01:28):

Yeah.

MBS (01:29):

You sign off on your emails, "Hail the underdogs." And I'm wondering, what was it that made you go, "I am a champion for the underdog."

Bobby (01:40):

Well, I love an underdog story, right? We're a sucker for it. I'm a front row fan of it. I feel like I've been one all my life. I think most people have that inside, but it's just always given me hope when I see someone model that transformational story. And it helps me say, "You know what? I have what it takes. I can do it too."

MBS (02:07):

Well, here's a question for you, Bobby. How do you... Because I totally get the power of the underdog. I remember reading a book by a guy called Adam Morgan, and of course I've forgot the name of the book, because clearly book



titles are too much for me today, but it was all about the power of being the number two in a market and what that gives you in terms of focus and courage and determination and something to do, but I can imagine there's a slippery slope between being the underdog and being stuck in victim status. So, how do you see the difference between being an underdog but being empowered and being an underdog and feeling disempowered?

Bobby ([02:50](#)):

Yeah. Wonderful question. I would say it real simple. I think it's the lens, and here's what I mean by that. I think being an underdog and a real intentional leader, it's not about looking out in your lens and comparing yourself and trying to get that ribbon. It's not about that. It's about, "Hey, am I doing everything I can to get to that place that I imagine." We're all climbing a mountain and there's a place that we imagine that looks and feels better than where we are today. Getting there, that's the journey.

MBS ([03:29](#)):

Got it. So, you are holding yourself out against an ambition and going, "This is what I'm up against," rather than comparing yourself to other people going, "I'm lesser than those other people."

Bobby ([03:42](#)):

No doubt. An ambition, an imagination. It's like, "Hey, who is that person and that leader that I imagine?" Yeah, I think one of the most important questions we can ask ourself in leadership is, "Who am I becoming?" and staying on that journey imperfectly, but consistently.

MBS ([04:00](#)):

What was the seed for you to start a company? Because it is hard to found a company and it is hard to be a CEO of a company, and there are plenty of other easier route to take than to do that. And I'm curious to know for you, as you



think about, particularly as in the context maybe of *The Gift of Struggle*, what was it that made you go, "Look, the challenge for me is to found something"? What was the motivation for that?

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

A kind act changed my life when I was a young man, Michael. I tell that story in the first chapter of *The Gift of Struggle*, the bus story, and that moment changed a trajectory for me, one person seeing me gave me the hope that I needed. 15 years later, that moment was raging like an inferno inside of me. I had the opportunity to take the leap, and I had a strong enough will and force driving me that I've... I often say the first five years are the most fun I never want to have again. And that force driving me got me through it, because you're right. It's hard. It's not about burning the candle at both ends. You're looking for more wax.

MBS ([05:20](#)):

Right.

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

Yeah. It got me through it.

MBS ([05:23](#)):

I love that. And I'm going to take that quote away, the five years of fun I never want to have again. I'm like, oh, I hear you on that. I totally get that. Hey Bobby, I love your book. I love the bus story as well, and a I'm curious to know which two pages you're choosing to read to us now.

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

Yeah. You want me to just get right into it?



MBS ([05:41](#)):

Yeah. Why don't we jump into it?

Bobby ([05:43](#)):

Yeah. Okay. Let's do it. So, my two pages are divided into three. Struggle is a gift. It wasn't until I was 18 in the army and three weeks into camp polishing my boots by flashlight at 11:30 PM that I began to reevaluate my upbringing. Surrounded by members of my new platoon, I found that most of the others were unprepared for long hours of drills, the sergeant's demeaning profanity, and the systematic breakdown of everything we thought to be true about ourselves. As everyone around me that night complained about waking up at 4:30 AM to start the next torturous day of training. I realized it was not that different from the life I had lived at home. I had already endured years of labor in the fields rising before dawn. I had already encountered blatant racism, and I was already accustomed to living without material comforts or much free time.

([06:40](#)):

That night, it occurred to me that what I had already experienced was as tough as what I would face in the next few months. For the first time, having struggled early in life was turning out to be an advantage. It felt like a gift not to worry whether I would make it through basic training. I never questioned whether I could handle the grueling physicality and mental strain demanded from new recruits. I simply needed to draw on the persistence, strength, and resilience I already had. I was grateful for the sacrifices my parents had made, but it took longer to internalize that my dad, a humble, powerful peasant had accomplished his goal for our family.

([07:20](#)):

Even though it didn't feel like it as a kid, he had succeeded in providing opportunities for his children that were never available to him. Eventually, I began to study, in earnest, what struggle had taught me, why should be grateful for it, and how I could apply the lessons it offered. In each case, struggle gave



me a gift. I realized that I could often look back to an event from my past to find the clarity I needed. When I found myself facing a new challenge, my life experience could provide a new story and a crucial lesson to add to what I knew.

MBS ([07:56](#)):

That is so great. And your story, as you tell it in the book, is such a compelling one because it is a life where you've had to struggle and how you transform that in a kind of chemical way from the hardness of that to doing good in this world in all sorts of different ways. The question I have for you is this, Bobby. I didn't have the same childhood. I had a pretty comfortable, middle class background, a white family in a white city in Australia growing up, parents who loved me and supported me, brothers who I love and love me. My difficulties were minor. And as I listened to your story, I'm like, do you need to go through that kind of transformative fire of struggle to be hardened, to do the next journey? What if you're... Here's my fear. What if you're soft like me?

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

You're far from soft, brother. Yeah. Here's the thought that I have, Michael, and that is... There's a technical aspect of struggle facing a difficulty or resistance, but the essence of what I want leaders and others to understand as I am on my mission to transform how the world you struggle is, the most painful struggle is the one that we have inside, and that is that self doubt. And it doesn't matter what your gender is, what your story is, what your economic situation is, we all have a PhD in struggle. It was with us from the beginning, and is going to be with us in the end. And the struggle that is the most painful is that one that manifests inside of self-doubt that prevents us from becoming who we want to become, getting to that place that we imagine, and making the impact that we want to in life.



(10:04):

So often, I think it's associated with economic struggle, but I've found that as hard and unfortunate as that aspect of my life was, it pales in comparison to the pain that we all feel inside when that self-doubt gets heavy. That's a real struggle

MBS (10:25):

As somebody who is a confidence whisperer, you're like, "Let me help you see the self-doubt and move through it and perhaps beyond it," where do you start? When you come to somebody established or not established, older or younger, white or a person of color, how do you sit with them and say, "Let me show you a path through your struggle, through your self doubt, to something else"?

Bobby (11:00):

I've always done a simple exercise. Michael, I call this, I give them the pen, because they're going to believe themselves before they believe me. You and I both know that, right?

MBS (11:08):

For sure.

Bobby (11:10):

I've done a very simple therapeutic exercise with leaders for years. I'll them take out a blank sheet of paper, and I'll say, "You know what? Let's go back to the beginning. On the left hand side of the paper, I want you to draw a line right through the middle of it. And on the left hand side, let's start with number one. I want you to write down the most significant struggles that you've had in your life. Go. Let's start one through whatever wherever we need to go here. And then to the right, I want you to look at that struggle, and to the right of it, I want you to write down the answer to this question, what did that struggle teach you and how has it served you?"



(11:52):

And my observation has been by the end of that exercise, not only is it a wonderful, deep excavation and therapeutic thought provoking journey for the leader that I'm guiding through there at the end, it gives me a lot of fulfillment because I can see their pupils dilate, and they will be like, "Wow, I've been through some stuff. And you're right. This one taught me compassion. This one taught me X. This one taught me Y. It's like I got this." So, that that's always been a real fun exercise. So, I'll just give them the pen and yeah, take them on a journey. Let's go back to the beginning.

MBS (12:30):

I love that. There's so much brilliance in that process, in part because of its simplicity.

Bobby (12:35):

Right.

MBS (12:36):

And in part because of that invitation to fully own the victimness, like, "Let me tell you my struggles. I'm glad you asked. How long have you got, Bobby? Because I've got a list."

Bobby (12:52):

I know a thing or two about advice. Pardon me to interrupt. We don't like hearing other people's advice, so I'm not going to tell them. I'm like, I'm not going to persuade you. Let's get you there on your own.

MBS (13:07):

I have a cleft lip and palate, so an odd shaped lip. The top of my... A cleft lip and palate, for those that don't know, when you're born as a child, instead of your top of your mouth being fully formed, it is a gap. Instead of your lip being fully



formed, there's a gap. That's why it's sometimes called a hare lip, a hare like a rabbit. You kind of got that kind of thing. And there was definitely a time in my life where I was quite self-conscious about that because it comes with a slight speech impediment, which people can hear and a slight kind of... There's other ways the face rearranges itself around that particular piece of me. And there was this moment, and this speaks to my experience of your exercise, Bobby, where I went, "What if my cleft lip and palate was a source of strength for me rather than a source of diminishment?"

[\(14:02\)](#):

And it's interesting, like you, I spend time on stages, virtual or otherwise, in front of people. And I'm like, so I have a speech impediment and I have an odd set of lips. And in fact, what if that made me feel more approachable and more accessible and more vulnerable, and therefore more relatable to people in terms of how I show up and how I talk. And it was an extremely liberating moment. And an example, I think perhaps of that power of taking the struggle and flipping it, to going, "How is this a source of nourishment? How is..." You may know the saying, Bobby, the wisdom enters through the wound. It's like, how does the wound be that source of wisdom for me?

Bobby [\(14:47\)](#):

Amen. Amen. Well, thanks for sharing that. I mean, it's our imperfections that make us human, right? And I agree with you. We must all go through struggle, pain, and suffering to get to wisdom. So, I'll often say the long ways to shortcut, so yeah, that's how you get there.

MBS [\(15:07\)](#):

Bobby, I might look at you now and I go, "He's transcended struggle. He's confident, generous, successful as a businessman, successful as a father, successful as a teacher in this world. The struggle has gone." Now, I'm probably wrong because as you said, the struggle, for most of us, is internal, and we've all



got that in some way, but how do you renew the commitment to that learning and self growth if you get to that place of some degree of self acceptance and self-awareness and confidence?

Bobby ([15:42](#)):

Yeah. Great question. If I don't stick to my rhythms and routines, I become an unhealthy Mexican mess and a fraction of a nanosecond. So, it takes a lot of work for me. And the moment I digress, and we all do, I can see the effects of the digression, my rhythms and my routines. And I think that's part of the interesting... That's the primary reason I use the mountain as a metaphor often in that we're always climbing, we're always imagining that place that looks and feels better than where we are today, and that climate is humbling. And I think at a certain point in time, I personally learned that asking for help is a sign of strength and I'm not afraid to do that anymore.

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

So, it can quickly digress for me if I don't stick with the things that I know work and simplify those. You and I are both students of simplicity.

MBS ([16:47](#)):

Yes.

Bobby ([16:47](#)):

So, I have my rhythm, my routine. If I don't write in my... If I don't journal... I journal often. Not every day, as consistent as I can. But if I don't find myself doing that, that internal narrative of mine, Michael, turns into a cranky old man that you don't even want to be around.

MBS ([17:09](#)):

I love that. Look, there are lots of people who do want to be around you. And so if people want to find out more about you and your work, where can they find you in the world?



Bobby ([17:21](#)):

They can follow me on LinkedIn. I'm very active on LinkedIn. My website's bobby-herrera.com. I'm actively sharing leadership stories, students with struggle stories, wonderful stories that give hope and help people take control of their story. And those are the two best places. And my book's fortunately everywhere. It's helped people from all over the world, and I appreciate you letting me share it with fellow underdogs.

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

I love your book. I love your storytelling. I love you as a teacher. And in fact, I'm just going to say the two pages festival is in fact brought to you by The Year of Living Brilliantly. And The Year of Living Brilliantly is this collection of 52 different teachers who share teaching from their lives. Bobby is one of those teachers. And if you haven't been convinced to buy the book... And if you haven't, you're nuts, you should buy his book immediately. But he teaches the bus story that he referenced right at the start of this conversation. And honestly, people love this episode. There are hundreds and hundreds of comments talking about this power of learning to tell your story is extraordinary, and the way you teach it is just dynamic. So, I'm encouraging people to sign up there. It's all absolutely free, and Bobby's just one of the brilliant teachers we have there. Bobby, thank you so much for joining us today. You are extraordinary. I love knowing you and having you in my life.

([18:47](#)):

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