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MBS ([00:02](#)):

Now, I'm going to introduce Whitney formally in just a minute. But I'm just going to tell you, I mean, I've already said this a little bit, but I want to say it again. Here's the two things I love about Whitney. There are many, but two things I'm going to pick on right now. First is, she has a relentless drive for self-improvement. And she has written numerous bestselling books, she's one of the top executive coaches in the world, she's been proclaimed as legendary across the world, and she's still hungry to learn and grow. Part of what I love about that is her commitment to her own S-curve, the sense of it is a continual process of growth and she kind of lives her words. So, that's one of the reasons I love her.

([00:48](#)):

The second reason is she's just incredibly generous. She will do anything for you. I just know so many people who've gone, "Yeah, Whitney's helped me with



this." and she just brings this smarts and this big heart to the conversation. So, let me read the formal introduction here. Whitney Johnson is CEO of WLJ Advisors, advisor to high-growth organizations and individuals. She is best known for her book, *Disrupt Yourself*. But today she'll be reading from her first book, *Dare, Dream, Do: Remarkable Things Happen When You Dare to Dream*. So Whitney, welcome.

Whitney ([01:25](#)):

Thank you, Michael. And what a lovely, kind introduction. That was just very... I'm very moved by it, so thank you very much.

MBS ([01:32](#)):

My pleasure, my pleasure. Now, here's what I'm curious about. Why are you reading from your first book? I mean, I love this book, it's on my shelf. But as you say, you've become known for your latter books. This was slightly less well known, as is often the case with first books, but you're taking us back in time. Why are you picking this book?

Whitney ([01:50](#)):

Yeah. So I chose this book because you asked me, you said two pages, right? Two pages that sum up who you are. That is a really tall order. These two pages though in particular, when I was writing *Dare, Dream, Do*, in many ways, this was my coming of age book, if you will. I remember when I was writing the book, I had a line editor looking at it. At one point I'm talking about the importance of dreaming, how it's our privilege, it's our birth right to dream, and how do you figure out what your dreams are? One of the line editors said to me, "You know, don't have anywhere in this book what your values are, how your values are important, and your faith in particular."



(02:28):

When she said that to me, I realized that I had had this massive blind spot that I was making this a priori assumption around dreaming. And there were all these things that I believed and thought and felt, and I wasn't articulating them. And so because of that feedback that she gave me, I made the decision, "Okay, so we do dream within the context of our values. All right, let's talk about what our values are." But then I thought, "But how do I know what my values are?" I struggled with that.

(02:55):

But then I realized I do know what my values are. And one of the ways I realized I could articulate them is, what are some quotes that I love, what are lyrics of songs that I love? I'm going to read those two pages in just a minute. If you're listening and you weren't on our live at 9:00 am, you can go to whitneyjohnson.com/two, T-W-O P-A-G-E-S, and read along with us. But the idea here is that I'm going to read two pages from this book, about we dream within the context of our values. And in particular some of the quotes that were especially meaningful to me, that then helped me articulate what's important to me, what do I value. Because as I said, we dream within the context of our values. We need to know what our why is to anchor us and allow us to dream, and to do, and to disrupt. And so, that's why I chose these two pages.

MBS (03:50):

I love that. This is so relevant for me. Because I'm in a dreaming phase at the moment. I stopped being the CEO at Box of Crayons about a year ago. Shannon Minifie took it over and is doing such a great job there.

Whitney (04:02):

Yay.



MBS ([04:02](#)):

But I'm in this process of trying to figure out what mbs.works is about. And part of it's experimenting. This festival is an experiment to go, "Do I like doing this? Is this fun? Is it useful? Does it feel like it serves a bigger purpose?" But actually, I've been in this process literally in the last week of collecting quotes, and trying to figure out what it is that I actually stand for. So, whatever you're going to read is just going to be perfect for me, so thank you. And why don't we go there right away? Why don't we leap in and hear your two pages?

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

Okay, happy to do that, but you need to know that I'm going to ask you to share one of your favorite quotes at the end. Will you do that?

MBS ([04:37](#)):

Sure.

Whitney ([04:37](#)):

Okay.

MBS ([04:39](#)):

I know what exactly what it is. I'm ready for you.

Whitney ([04:42](#)):

Okay, perfect. All right. So, two pages. The title of this section is called Dreaming in the Context of Your Beliefs. It's not always easy to integrate our secular lives with our spiritual lives, which revolve around our principles, perhaps even our religion. Haven't we all had moments when we wish we could just ignore this piece of ourselves? But what we believe is who we are. There are unique tensions because of what we believe. But from these principles also come our strengths. So, to close this chapter, I'd like to share some of my core beliefs or guiding principles that lead me to believe that dreaming is essential, that help



me sift through possible dreams and encourage me as I seek to achieve my dreams.

[\(05:32\)](#):

Here's the first quote. "You can bet your life, and that, and twice its double, that God knew exactly where he wanted you to be placed." These lyrics from Stevie Wonder's album, *Songs in the Key of Life*, encapsulate what I believe about your life and mine. Each of us is exactly where we're supposed to be, so we can learn what we need to learn, accomplish what we're meant to accomplish, help those we were meant to help. In short, where we are, who we are, and what we do matters.

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

Next quote. "The only safe harbor is our convictions," and that's from me. As I mentioned in chapter two, I came by this principle, or maxim, the hard way. It was my job as an investment analyst, so I used to work on Wall Street, to have an opinion about whether people should buy or sell certain stocks. Yet, as I had grown up, as do most girls, learning to give up resources, including my views and opinions. This background made it difficult for me to expressly and publicly state my views, because they would inevitably make someone angry with me. The experience taught me that I need to speak my truth clearly and gently, and then let things fall where they may next.

[NEW_PARAGRAPH]Next quote. "To be happy at home is the ultimate result of all ambition," Samuel Johnson, 18th century English author. This Wisdom from Samuel Johnson is as true today as it was in the 18th century. If my dreams don't ultimately strengthen my relationships, if the fleece I gather isn't spun into wool that binds me to those I love, then it's not a dream I want to dream.

[\(07:26\)](#):

Two more quotes. "The desire to create is one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul," Dieter F. Ucktdorf, religious leader and former aviator. When we create, we are dreaming and we are happy. Easier said than done, hence this



book. And then the final quote is, "I pass the test," Lady Galadriel in Lord of the Rings, J. R. R. Tolkien. When Frodo, encouraged by Lady Galadriel's goodness and wisdom, offers her the ring, she wants to accept it desperately. She says, "I do not deny that my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer. And now at last it comes. I shall be beautiful and terrible as the morning and the night, stronger than the foundations of the Earth. All shall love me and despair. No matter how much I may desire to do good, once I have that power, it can corrupt me." I want to pass the test as Galadriel did.

MBS ([08:35](#)):

So good. That was awesome, Whitney. Thank you. And you actually shared what might be the most essential takeaway of this entire conference, which is if you do not know the album Songs in the Key of Life, you should just stop doing everything and go and listen to that, because it is one of the all time great albums of forever. It's fantastic.

Whitney ([08:58](#)):

Yes, indeed it is. Yes, indeed it is.

MBS ([09:01](#)):

Have you been collecting quotes and kind of sifting through them to find those ones that resonated so powerfully for you? Or did you go, "I need quotes," and go out and find them? How did you find those quotes in particular?

Whitney ([09:13](#)):

Those quotes in particular, those are ones that I had been collecting. I mean, if you think about Songs in the Key of Life, I heard that when I was a teenager, and it had always stayed with me. The one about Lady Galadriel I had heard in the prior three or four years. So, I made sure that they were quotes... I didn't go out and collect quotes. They were quotes that I had heard.



MBS ([09:13](#)):

Yeah.

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

There's another one that I include in there, is Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Rings and jewels are but apology for gifts. The only true gift is a portion of thyself." And that was one that I had thought of for a long time. So I mean, there was a little bit of collection, but I'd say that's maybe 10, 15%. Mostly it was quotes that had come to help me think about what do I actually value? How do I view the world and how do I want to show up in the world?

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

I'll tell you what I think is part of the power of quotes, is a nuance and complexity in what's being said there that goes beyond how values are often stated. Because often values are reduced down to a singular word. And I find that that makes them a little bloodless. They're a little too abstract.

Whitney ([10:23](#)):

Yep.

MBS ([10:23](#)):

They're a little too... I'm not sure what the word is. Often motherhood and apple pie-ish. I've got some quotes that I've been using to guide my way forward in this time. But I have an expression of a personal value, and it's called Naked On Stage. That sounds like a metaphor, but actually it's got a literal story. When I was in law school, I was in the Law School Review. It is a comedy performance, a bit like Monty Python kind of origins. And with a friend of mine, we did something called synchronized nude male modeling, where my friend and I backed onto stage together naked and to Boléro, Ravel's Boléro. We went through a whole series of coordinated moves whilst there was some commentary going on around that.



[\(11:13\)](#):

And the moment of standing in the wings for the first time about to take my dressing gown off, my robe off, and step onto stage naked in front of my whole law school, oh my goodness, the adrenaline and the kind of excitement and fear all coursing through me was such a moment. And that call, Naked On Stage, what it caused me is a visceral memory, and a complexity. Because it's not just be courageous, it's be provocative, and be courageous, and take a risk, and be vulnerable. It's a whole bunch of stuff entangled.

[\(11:48\)](#):

And my hypothesis would be with a quote is something similar. Because when you read that quote, you get that moment where you're like, "Whoa." Like that Lady Galadriel in Lord of the Rings, that moment in the movie where she's saying that, and then her face turns, dark and there's that hit when she's saying that, "Ah, I will be," whatever, "Invincible and terrible," and then, "I passed the test," it's a visceral moment.

Whitney [\(12:13\)](#):

Yeah. I think the quote, to your point, it becomes packed with emotion and feeling, and it becomes a talisman. When you use words like courage, like you said, it's just so abstract, it doesn't mean anything. But when you attach a quote to it, there's feeling, there's emotion, there's memory. Like you said, Naked On Stage, that evokes so much more than just those words. So that's why, again, I think for anybody who's wondering, "Well, what do I value? What do I care about? What are my whys?" If you start to scroll through the file cabinet of your memory, that's probably an acronym. But if you start to scroll through, you'll start to say, "Oh, actually I do know what I value."

MBS [\(12:54\)](#):

Yeah. I'm curious to know, I mean, it's been a while since the book came out, have you noticed that you've had some quotes lose a little bit of their luster and



other quotes have shown up? Or do they feel like they're actually pretty consonant and pretty resonant even now?

Whitney ([13:10](#)):

That's a great question. I would say that some of them, yeah, in some ways they're almost more resonant now. So I think that's what's interesting, is I think about Stevie Wonder's quote, and especially given everything that's happening right now in the world around racial inequality. And then I think about Stevie saying, like how he's the first per first person saying, "You can bet your life and that and twice it's double that God knew exactly where he wanted you to be placed," That has additional resonance for me right now.

MBS ([13:42](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

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

I think about that yearning to create. I've been talking a lot about taking on market risk, creating versus competing. And so it's adding in layers of meeting for me. I think, to your point, there probably are some in here that have dropped off, but those ones that I read in particular have stayed pretty top of mind.

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

Yeah. For me, there's wisdom in the sense that it's worth continually coming back to your values. And it's not so much that the value itself changes, but the angle in which you view it changes, and it kind of casts a different light and you see it in a different way. And it feels like the fundamentals arrive, but maybe survive, but the expression of it perhaps changes and evolves. You may find another quote that speaks to the same principles, but just speaks to you now, it speaks to me as a 52 year old man in a way that it wouldn't have as a 35 year old man, for instance.



Whitney ([14:40](#)):

Okay, so what's one of your quotes that you're going to share?

MBS ([14:43](#)):

The quote that is perfect for part of me at the moment is this, it's from Nabokov.

Whitney ([14:49](#)):

Okay.

MBS ([14:50](#)):

And he says, "Curiosity is insubordination in its purest form." There's so much there that I love, Whitney. That first of all, the curiosity. I am a champion for curiosity, and asking great questions and the like. But I love the fact that it's about insubordination. Because insubordination is not just making trouble, although that's part of it, and there's part of me that quite likes that. But insubordination is also about challenging power structures. It's about shining a light on how power works.

([15:25](#)):

And one of the things that I've come to realize in the kind of self-reflection that I've been doing at the moment is not being complacent about my role in the way power works. Because I'm a straight, white, educated, tall dude with his hair. So, I tick a whole lot of boxes that put me in a place of privilege and luck. But to go, "Oh, so that's why I finished law school being sued by one of my law school professors for defamation. That's why I got banned from high school, and that's why I did this as a road [inaudible 00:16:03]. There's a whole bunch of ways that I'm like, "I'm in the system, and I'm also bucking against the system at the same time." And that quote has a lot of that complexity and richness in it for me.



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

Yeah. What I love about that quote is in some ways, I mean, from what I know of you, and as you know, I continually quote you...

MBS ([16:21](#)):

Thank you.

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

And what else, and what was useful for you. What I know of you is, I think that quote, if you needed to have an epitaph today, that quote would be perfect for Michael Bungay Stanier. Perfect.

MBS ([16:35](#)):

It would be pretty fantastic. Whitney, our time is almost up. And for, Whitney, people who haven't yet fully discovered you, where can they find out more about who you are and what you do?

Whitney ([16:44](#)):

Yeah, I think the best way is, we prepared a special thing just because I knew we were coming to visit with you on your 2 Pages, Michael, is to go to whitneyjohnson.com/twopages. You can download what I read today. That will automatically subscribe you to our newsletter, and that will give you... And you can unsubscribe if you want... our newsletter, lots of people love it, but it is not for everyone to be able, to go through. That's the best way to get introduced to our ideas.

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

Perfect. And Whitney, just remind me what the name of your podcast is.

Whitney ([17:16](#)):

Disrupt Yourself.



MBS ([17:18](#)):

Perfect.

Whitney ([17:18](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([17:18](#)):

And it's true, you have an amazing array of guests. I've been lucky enough to be a guest twice. But I'm B list compared to some of the people that you've had on. Thank you for listening. Thank you for reviewing. Thank you for passing the word along. That's how we grow best, when you find an interview you love and you send it to somebody you love, say, "You should listen to this." I'll finish by simply saying you're awesome and you're doing great.