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

Way, way back in the midst of time, distant past, in a time before color TV, before TV had more than three channels, definitely well before iPhones and the like, my brother Nigel and I had a game we occasionally played when it was raining too hard to go out and kick a ball around out back, pick up sticks. So if you don't know this game, imagine about 30 bamboo skewers all with a range of different colors painted on their two ends. Now you held them in a bunch in your hand close to the table, and then released the hand and just let them fall in a hildy pildy pile. Once they settled, the game was to remove them one by one from the pile.

([00:46](#)):

Now if you did that and nothing shifted in the delicately balanced structure, well you got to keep the stick, and with the attendant points, the colors at either end told you how much each stick was worth. So the single, there was only one of



these, but it had black on either end, and that was definitely worth the most. And then there were a bunch of green sticks, maybe 10, they were worth the least. But if you were trying to do that and the pile shifted at all, well you had to stop, and your turn was over. I think this is the first memory I had of a game where the goal was to remove things. That was the level of expertise. This wasn't Lego or Monopoly, where you were striving to build or striving to accumulate. This was surgery.

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

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS. It's a podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, book that has shaped them. Leidy Klotz is a professor at the University of Virginia. He's also the author of one of my favorite books about change, *Subtract*, hence the pickup sticks story. Now, there's a really good reason you find this on must read lists for design and behavioral science and change. I'm actually just about to start writing a primer on change, and this is going to be one of the seminal texts that I'm going to be writing about. Now, we all take detours in life. Nobody's life path is a straight highway. Turns out that being an author and a teacher is Leidy's detour.

Leidy [\(02:18\)](#):

For the first half of my life I thought of myself as a soccer player. That was my identity. I grew up as a kid playing soccer, played through high school, chose my college based on soccer, where I could kind of start at forward as soon as possible and also get a good education. And then I actually played professional soccer for a couple years after college, making \$2,000 a month, so I wasn't Lionel Messi.



MBS ([02:44](#)):

When Leidy left soccer behind, he returned to his education. He'd earned a degree in engineering and worked for a time building schools. And he initially enjoyed that work, but...

Leidy ([02:56](#)):

I don't know, this thing happens after college where all of a sudden there's no summer breaks anymore. And after about three years of not having summer break, I'm sitting there thinking, "Oh, this is the job I'm going to be doing if I don't change something."

MBS ([03:08](#)):

Leidy wanted to contribute more to the world, and do so in a way that created a life that he enjoyed. That turned out to be research, and teaching, and surrounding himself with like-minded people.

Leidy ([03:19](#)):

Most my closest collaborators are behavioral scientists, and so I think I study the science of design. And that's where Subtract came in, as the science of taking something from how it is to how we want it to be, and subtracting is a basic option there that we overlook.

MBS ([03:35](#)):

But for all the brilliant people that Leidy associated with, it was a toddler, just three years old, who taught him one of the most important and overlooked tools of design.

Leidy ([03:45](#)):

The closest to an epiphany moment was playing Legos with my son, yeah. And so I had, here, you can see, this is the actual bridge we were playing with.



MBS ([03:54](#)):

Oh that's great.

Leidy ([03:56](#)):

And it's not level, as you can see. And so my instinct was to turn around, grab this block, add to the shorter column of the bridge. Before I could do that, my son Ezra, who was three at the time, he's eight now and has a soccer game tomorrow, but he was three at the time, and he removed a block from the longer column to make the level bridge. I knew that we kind of had this tendency to add, but right in that moment it kind of really gave me a way that I could think about it and study it and focusing on the actual thing, which is it's not the end state of less, it's what makes us think when we're trying to improve something that adding is our first instinct, or that we add even when subtracting would be just as good, or that we add when subtracting could be even better?

MBS ([04:50](#)):

And for those of you Who are listening rather than watching on the YouTube, Leidy held up five bits of Lego. There were three blocks on one side, a little flat bit connecting it to two blocks on the other side, and that was the uneven bridge. So do you add or do you subtract? I guess, Leidy, I'm interested to know, when was the moment when you went, "I love the making of things." When I was growing up we played Legos, or Lego as we call it in Australia, without the S on the end, and my brother Nigel just had this ability to take a drawer full of Lego, because we didn't have the kits in those days, and he would just make stuff. And I actually didn't have that ability. I would watch him, and I wanted to make all the blocks the same color, because I have got a design essence to me. But I'm wondering where you first noticed that kind of flame around creating or building.



Leidy ([05:47](#)):

I don't know that I have that. I mean, I have the noticing flame. I definitely, when I go into a space I see the buildings, and I even see the geography. So I notice the stuff that's built around us. But I don't necessarily... You wouldn't want me to build your house for you. I'm not a tinkerer. So I think where I add is in ideas. I like thinking about the ideas and adding them. And I certainly have an affinity for the things that we add to the world to make it better. I think those are interesting, definitely. I mean, and I played a lot of Lego, but when you describe your brother, he sounds more advanced than me at Lego.

MBS ([06:32](#)):

Right. Yeah. I want to ask you another question about your past, if I can.

Leidy ([06:37](#)):

Yeah.

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

How do you think what you learned being a soccer player influences how you show up in your current ways of working?

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

I think what sports are really good at is just creating this artificial, of course, but creating this simulation of life. And so, I learned how to lose. I lost half the time. And be really disappointed. Feel like, "Holy cow, I put everything I had into that, worked with my teammates, tried as hard as I could, and the ball hit the freaking post and bounced out, and the other team scored." And so, learning that. Also learning that if you do put effort in, again, it's a very controlled thing, but you can see the output of that very quickly in a relative scale. I mean, if you're working on ideas or working on a book it takes forever. But if you're playing a sport, you can practice one day and use it the next day in the game, and see it work. So, I think just like that distillation of life down into this kind of game form



I think gives you a lot of those experiences in rapid time that you can then just draw on as you move through the rest of your life.

MBS ([08:00](#)):

Yeah, that's interesting. As I think about my life as a soccer player, and I still play, but now it's at a very slow pace with a bunch of other old man like me. We totter around a game together. But it was a place I noticed that I understood patterns.

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

Patterns. Interesting. Yeah.

MBS ([08:19](#)):

I was a defender. And so I could understand what was coming at me, and figure out how to be in the best position to be of most utility.

Leidy ([08:29](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([08:29](#)):

And I feel like that's where I really started to learn that, and see that, and notice that about myself as a strength, and a bit different from other people.

Leidy ([08:38](#)):

Yeah, that's interesting. Because I love seeing that. I'm coaching the under 10 team right now, of Ezra's, and this is emerging now. You're seeing some of the kids... And some of the kids are really good at, I would think, defensive patterns, what you just described, where they're always... I mean, we teach them a little bit about spacing, but they're just naturally in the right spot on defense. And then other kids like my son Ezra's really good at offensive patterns. He's always



scoring, and it's just because he's popping up at the right spot. And you're like, "How is he learning this?"

[\(09:12\)](#):

And so, yeah, I think that's fascinating. I also think a really cool thing is... I mean, now when you play, somebody you've never played with, you know where they're going to be, they know where you're going to... and it's like this instant brotherhood that like, "Oh, yeah, you're a good person because you know where I'm going to run on the soccer field."

MBS [\(09:31\)](#):

Or you're not a good person, because I made the run, and as a 55 year old man making a run, I've given it everything. I'm no good for 20 minutes after making a run. So if you don't feed me the ball, come on, man, you're dead to me.

Leidy [\(09:45\)](#):

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's the end of our relationship if I make an overlapping run and you don't give me the ball. Yeah.

MBS [\(09:51\)](#):

That's exactly right.

Leidy [\(09:53\)](#):

That's awesome.

MBS [\(09:54\)](#):

This is a perfect segue to ask you to tell us about the book you've chosen to read from.

Leidy [\(09:59\)](#):

Okay. Well there's this amazing author, Eduardo Galeano, and I figured the World Cup's coming up, he has unequivocally the best soccer book of all time,



called Soccer in Sun and Shadow. He's a Uruguayan guy, and all of his writing is really interesting, and he writes kind of in a poetic historical political... You'll see. So there's a passage from this book, in Soccer in Sun and Shadow, I figured some of your... All the passages are great. I figured some of your audience would be interested in what's relevant to coaching. So he's got a passage called The Manager.

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

Oh, perfect.

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

And so I would like to read that.

MBS ([10:44](#)):

Before you get going with that, how did you come across this book? When did it come into your life?

Leidy ([10:47](#)):

I like reading all the uses how soccer explains the world books. There's one that's literally called that, but then there's a great one about Holland, and how soccer evolved the same way the culture evolved. And then as you explore into those, they all reference this one. And then you look at the list, and this one's at the top of all the lists, and I had to go to this. You could write the Australian one. I don't think there's an Australian one yet.

MBS ([11:16](#)):

There's not. But I'm listening to a podcast at the moment called The Rest is History. Two British historians who have a great chemistry together. And they're literally going through each of the 32 teams that are in the World Cup to talk about some story vaguely connected to soccer, and football, and their country.





So maybe I could learn about the few Australian players who have kind of broken through.

Leidy ([11:41](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's awesome.

MBS ([11:43](#)):

All right, well Leidy Klotz, over to you, reading Soccer in Sun and Shadow. Brilliant.

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

Okay. The Manager. In the old days there was the trainer, and nobody paid him much heed. He died without a word when the game stopped being a game, and professional soccer required a technocracy to keep the players in line. That was when the manager was born. His mission, to prevent improvisation, restrict freedom, and maximize the productivity of the players, who were now obliged to become disciplined athletes. The trainer used to say, "Let's play." The manager says, "Let's go to work."

([12:23](#)):

Today they talk in numbers. The history of soccer in the 20th century, a journey from daring to fear, is a trip from the 2-3-5 to the 5-4-1 by way of the 4-3-3 and the 4-2-2. Any ignoramus could translate that much with a little help, but the rest is impossible. The manager dreams up formulas as mysterious as the immaculate conception, which he uses to develop tactical schemes as indecipherable as the Holy Trinity. From the old blackboard to the electronic screen, now great plays are planned by computer and taught by video. These dream maneuvers are rarely shown when the matches are broadcast. Television prefers to focus on the furloughs in the manager's brow. We see him knowing his fists or shouting instructions that would certainly turn the match around, if anyone could understand them.



(13:08):

Journalists pepper him with questions at the postmatch press conference, but he never reveals the secrets of his victories, although he formulates admirable explanations of his defeats. "The instructions were clear, but they didn't listen," he says when the team suffers a big loss to a crummy rival. Or he dispels any doubts by talking about himself in the third person, more or less like this, "The reverses the team suffered today will never mar the achievement of a conceptual clarity that this manager once described as a synthesis of the many sacrifices required to become truly effective."

(13:40):

The machinery of spectacle grinds up everything in its path, nothing lasts very long, and the manager is as disposable as any other product of consumer society. Today the crowd's screams never die, and next Sunday they invite him to kill himself. The manager believes soccer is a science and the field a laboratory, but the genius of Einstein and the subtlety of Freud is not enough for the owners and the fans. They want a miracle worker, like our Lady of Lourdes, with the stamina of Gandhi.

MBS (14:08):

That's fantastic. That made me laugh the whole way through it. And if you're listening and you're wondering what all those numbers were, those were ways of explaining the setup of teams on the field.

Leidy (14:18):

Yeah, I was going to cut that out, but then you said you were interested in soccer, so I was like, "Well, I'll give him the formations."

MBS (14:25):



Exactly, starting at the 2-3-5, which is how I learn how to play soccer, two defenders, three midfielders, five attackers. What did you love about this chapter, Leidy?

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

I mean, it's exemplary of his writing. And the title of the book, again, Soccer in Sun and Shadow, and the book's almost like a Rorschach test of your disposition. Because I read this and I see all the sun stuff, and I gave this to my friend and he was just like, "That book's way too depressing." So I think you can see it as like, "Okay, this is depressing. Soccer's falling into this very mechanistic way of doing things." But then seeping through that cynicism is the fact that, of course people are working against this, and of course he's, in laying out that cynical approach, he's pointing out that there's also a way to do it differently, and that we still find joy in the game even with it being kind of bludgeoned out of the game in some ways. So, that's what I liked about this passage.

MBS ([15:32](#)):

Yeah, I loved that too. How do you find your balance between play and work? You set up this kind of trainer versus manager, that's play versus let's go to work.

Leidy ([15:44](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([15:45](#)):

How do you find that balance?

Leidy ([15:50](#)):

I think a lot about flow states, where just working at the limit... I guess I just said work instead of play. But being at the limits of your abilities, and recognizing



that that's a really fulfilling spot to be in. And so I would say that the times where I feel like I'm working are things that I know are going to be in service of putting myself in that flow state. It's like, "Okay, I want to write this next book, and that's going to be really enjoyable, and useful and fulfilling. And one of the things that I have to do to get there is to figure out what the comparable titles are, or figure out something that isn't going to put me in a flow state, but it feels a little bit like work."

MBS ([16:41](#)):

Yeah.

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

But I also feel like it's just, if something feels like work, and you've got the luxury of adjusting your life accordingly, how can you get it out of there, spend more time on the play stuff, right?

MBS ([16:58](#)):

Well, I wanted to make the connection between all of what you talk about in *Subtract*, your book, and this idea of a flow state. And I'm curious to know, what connection is there, if any, between this idea that removing stuff is a powerful act, and the power of getting into this kind of what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would call this flow state, where you kind of lose yourself and find yourself, and you're kind of connected to the best of who you are, time speeds up and slows down at the same time, all of that. What if anything is there a connection?

Leidy ([17:39](#)):

Yeah. Thank you for pronouncing his name so that I don't.

MBS ([17:45](#)):

There's about a 6% chance I've pronounced it correctly, but I just went for it.



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

You went for it. Yeah. You were very confident in your pronunciation. One of the arguments I make, I think I make it in the book even, is that subtracting is hard. One of the reasons we don't do it is it's hard, because it's additional work. Often the subtractions that we're talking about, when your editors have to edit this podcast, you've recorded the podcast, it's good enough, you could put it out there, and now you're going to do extra work to take stuff out. And often we see this end state of the podcast and you're like, "Oh, look, Michael puts out these really great podcasts. It appears effortless," when in fact there is additional work that people aren't seeing.

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

That's right.

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

So that's a disadvantage. But I think that that work to get from good enough to even better through subtraction often kind of puts you in a flow state. I think of it in terms of editing words. So, one of the attributes of a flow state is that it's doable. You're working at the limits of your ability, but it's not beyond your ability.

MBS ([18:52](#)):

Right.

Leidy ([18:53](#)):

And sometimes when I have a blank page, and can't think of what to write, that's beyond my ability. That's not a fun spot to be. But it is a fun spot to be and when you're like, "Okay, you've got it basically there," and now you're just improving by taking away, and it's kind of working at that one little challenge that you're able to solve relatively quickly, and then another challenge that you can solve and move on. So in that sense I think subtracting can... some of this



extra subtracting that might seem like extra work can actually be quite enjoyable if we pay attention to how we're experiencing it. I don't know what your thoughts are on it, but that's my small tie-in.

MBS ([19:35](#)):

Yeah. I think that there's some truth to that. And here's what I'm noticing at the moment. I'm on the tail end of a new book, and so we've gone through the easy editing, where my editor goes, "This is a bit crap, isn't it?" And I'm like, "That is a bit crap. That's easy for me to lose." And now she's cutting out the bits that I'm attached to.

Leidy ([19:59](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([20:04](#)):

And I've literally got a draft due to her by five o'clock today, and I'm just sitting with some bits where she's like, "Why don't we cut this?" And I'm noticing my resistance to that. What's the connection, Leidy, between the discipline of lasts and grief?

Leidy ([20:27](#)):

Yeah. That's interesting. Certainly losing things can bring grief, the things that you really care about. And I think that a lot of the things, that if you take them away and they bring grief, maybe aren't things that you wanted to take away. But we have an emotional attachment to things, and it becomes hard to take them away. And I think one way around that for your writing, and this is easier said than done, is the emotional attachment, as much as possible, shifting that emotional attachment to the end product. Because what you really want is a book that clearly communicates the things that are going to help your people



that you're communicating with, which is what you're obviously successful at. And then, when that's the thing you have the emotional attachment to, it becomes easier to let go of this little piece of it that's, "Hey, maybe this is interesting on its own, but it's not serving the larger vision."

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

Yeah. I'm finding it just interesting to sit with... I mean, I have this commitment to a really great book at the end. I want to write the best book I can, I want to write the shortest book I can that's still useful, I want to create something that has kind of a crystalline elegance and beauty to it. So, my dream of a book is it's written so well that people find it hard to stop reading.

Leidy ([22:00](#)):

Right.

MBS ([22:01](#)):

They find themselves, they read through it to the end of the book.

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

And they're mad, right?

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

Yeah, exactly.

Leidy ([22:07](#)):

They're not mad, they're just disappointed that it's over. Yeah.

MBS ([22:09](#)):

Right, exactly. Exactly. And so, I've got that sense of the bigger picture. And then I'm like, "Ah, it's hard to cut some of these things that Kendra, my editor, is



suggesting I cut." What have you learned, Leidy, around how to better notice what might be removed?

Leidy ([22:37](#)):

Yeah. I think one thing that's useful there is trying to zoom in and out basically. Assuming it is kind of obvious. It's like, "Okay, pay really close scrutiny to this thing and you'll realize it doesn't need to be there." But the zooming out, it's kind of like when you zoom out from how you're viewing a situation, you might see that the thing that you're trying to do is being done somewhere else. And I'll give you, one of my favorite subtracting examples is the Strider bike. These are the little bikes that toddlers can ride, because-

MBS ([23:11](#)):

You talk about this in the book, Subtract, as well of course, which is great.

Leidy ([23:14](#)):

Yeah. But the reason toddlers can ride them is because the wheels have been removed. Or, not the wheels, the pedals and the drivetrain. And so the toddlers propel along like a Flintstone vehicle. One of the key breakthroughs there, yes, you had to think of subtracting the pedals, but the reason that that works is because you see something in the toddler. You have to add the human to the system there, and then you realize, "Oh, the toddler can propel..." which isn't super surprising. We know they have a lot of energy.

([23:49](#)):

But, the toddler can also balance, which is a more surprising thing. And so, by zooming out there and seeing more of the situation, you realize, "Oh, we don't actually need the training wheels to provide balance." So, yeah, I think-

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

That's helpful.





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

... playing around with the perspective you're using of the situation helps you realize what... And it kind of goes back also to our book example. If you zoom out to the whole book, then it's not as critical, this one little piece.

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

Have you come across ways to help people develop that capacity to zoom out? Because it is-

Leidy ([24:30](#)):

It's hard.

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

When I remember I'm like, "Well, that was obvious." And when I don't remember, I just don't remember it, and I miss the opportunity to see the more holistic pattern, or the bigger picture, and therefore gain a different perspective around that. How have you learned or how have you taught others to better able to see a different picture?

Leidy ([24:52](#)):

Yeah, that's a beautiful question. I think we talk a lot about systems thinking in my class, and there's a lot of definitions for that. But there is a great book called Thinking in Systems by Donella Meadows that's kind of a cult classic. So, systems is just kind of seeing the big picture, seeing how things are related to each other as opposed to just looking at the individual parts. I mean, there's a little more to it than that, but those kind of methods I think really help us look at situations at a different level than we normally do. Yeah, Thinking in Systems is the best kind of go to book about it.



MBS ([25:37](#)):

Right.

Leidy ([25:38](#)):

There's also some really cool videos on the Internet that I use in my class from, there's a place called The Complexity Lab, and they have these short YouTube videos about systems thinking that I think are helpful, that's why I assign them to students.

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

Yeah. And do you have any specific ways you remember to do that in your own day to day life, or is it now you've just built that capacity?

Leidy ([26:03](#)):

Oh, I don't know that I have the capacity. Unlike you, who knows where I'm missing it?

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

Yeah.

Leidy ([26:14](#)):

Some tools, I guess, like using the five why's kind of helps with that. I mean, you've got the, "Why am I doing this?" Ask why again, ask why again. That's effectively having you zoom out conceptually. This is another coin termed by Donella Meadows, but leverage points, so where are the most effective places to intervene in the system, that's something that I practice.

MBS ([26:41](#)):

It's helpful.

Leidy ([26:42](#)):



Go ahead.

MBS ([26:43](#)):

Well, that's helpful.

Leidy ([26:43](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([26:46](#)):

One of the stories I loved in the book was you talking about a particular tricky course that you were doing at university, and how you were scraping a C average, and you're like, "If I fail to pass this it shuts off all sorts of opportunities ahead of me." And come the final exam, this critical exam you had to pass, you did really, really well. And to vaguely your surprise, and the professor's surprise, and probably your classmates' surprise, because you hadn't been doing that well before hand.

Leidy ([27:20](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([27:20](#)):

And you talk about you to figure out the essential thing to note in all of that. How do you do that? It reminds me of that quote around finding simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Leidy ([27:37](#)):

Yes.

MBS ([27:37](#)):

Where you're like, "You know what, I started simple, but too simplistic."



Leidy ([27:42](#)):

Right, you didn't know anything.

MBS ([27:44](#)):

You move into complexity, and you go, "It's all a bit overwhelming." And then there's this, for me anyway, this kind of process of kneading, or working the material, and a sense of simplicity emerges from it, and you're like, "I think I'm seeing what's essential here." I'm wondering how you build that capacity.

Leidy ([28:05](#)):

Yeah. I think it was one of the things I was fortunate about in my engineering education career, was getting the opportunities to do that.

MBS ([28:15](#)):

Right.

Leidy ([28:17](#)):

So, that class was really helpful. Not necessarily because I used... the equation was  $F = MA$ , I never use that anymore. But the seeing that by working hard, doing the problems, but then also keep going and figure out what the essence is, seeing that that's helpful kind of gives me more motivation to do it in other parts of my life. So I think just knowing that it's there, and that there are rewards for getting there. But also, again, I think this is one of the cool tensions about subtracting, is that it's not easy. It's actually more work. You told the story perfectly, because it's a really easy story to mess up and say like, "Oh, he realized it was just this simple thing, and all along he had been making it



confusing." It's like, "No, he had been working all along, but didn't get to the simplicity until later."

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

Right.

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

And I think there are a lot of things like that, where it just requires the work. And again, it's fun work, but-

MBS ([29:22](#)):

Yeah.

Leidy ([29:23](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([29:23](#)):

One of the other things I've been sitting with, I think this ties back to what you touched on in your reading as well, is one way to hold less, and this idea of how do you figure out what's essential, how do you remove what's extraneous, is the price you pay is a lack of input, and incoming, and adventure. Because you're like, "I'm trying to reduce what's in my circle, rather than add to what's coming in." I'm wondering, first of all, do you see that as a tension? But I'm trying to figure out, how do I find the balance between a rock, excess, adventure, adding stuff on, and less, and essential, and elegant. Although, I know less is not necessarily elegant.

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



That's a hard one. But it does allow me to point out that I'm agnostic on adding and subtracting. I think if I had to choose one or the other I would probably choose adding. And one of the big points is that we don't have to choose. These are complementary approaches to making change. I would say one cool framing that I heard recently is that, especially as it relates to information, if you're the one going out there and getting it, then it's great. But if it's information that's just being thrown at you and you're soaking it in, that tends to be the information that's clogging up our space.

[\(30:57\)](#):

But I do also appreciate your point about adventure. Because sometimes you just... I mean, you can't go searching for something that expands your boundaries in the same way that something gets presented to you that is new. So yeah, so I think of it in terms of kind of controlling the information versus the other way around in terms of adding and subtracting information. And then, yeah, your podcast is actually a good example of... how you set this up is a really cool way to keep your boundaries expanded. Because somebody comes and reads a book that you didn't tell them to read, and now you know about it, and you can decide whether or not you want to read it or not.

MBS [\(31:43\)](#):

That's right.

Leidy [\(31:44\)](#):

I do that with graduate students a lot. I'm lucky enough to work with PhD students, And they all kind of have their own research project. I try to give them a lot of flexibility, one, so that they have kind of ownership over their own process, project, but also selfishly it's like, "This is how I'm going to not be doing the same exact thing I was five years ago."



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

Yeah. Here's what I'm taking from your answer there, which is, and this is what you mentioned at the start of the book as well, which is less is an action.

Leidy ([32:18](#)):

Yes. Yeah.

MBS ([32:18](#)):

And its work. It's not an outcome, which is just a reduced amount of stuff.

Leidy ([32:24](#)):

Right.

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

And what I'm hearing is, you talk about, for instance, where do you get information from, is what's active and what's passive in terms of what's coming into your life.

Leidy ([32:34](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([32:34](#)):

And as you maintain action, you get a choice to kind of move between removing and adding in terms of what serves you best in that moment.

Leidy ([32:47](#)):

Yeah. Don't you think about this when you're writing your book? Because you have all this cognitive capacity devoted to the book. When I'm writing, I'm really conscious of what I'm reading, because I'm like, "Oh, this is going to seep into the book." Or if I read Galeano, it's so different that I'm not going to try to make it go into my book.



MBS ([33:11](#)):

No, that's exactly right. As I've been writing this new book I've been deliberately trying to read beyond the topic of the book.

Leidy ([33:19](#)):

Right.

MBS ([33:20](#)):

And what's interesting is I'm still finding solutions to writing problems I have in these other books. I'm reading this random book of science fiction, and I'm like, "Oh, that's really good. Okay, I could take that and use that, and adapt that in a way to try and explain this thing, which I've so far only come up with vanilla clichés as a way of explaining." So, it can definitely happen.

Leidy ([33:40](#)):

That's awesome, yeah. It's a double-edged sword, or just a sword. Because you've got... a part of me just wants to read a book and not think about how it relates to the other idea that I'm thinking about.

MBS ([33:58](#)):

Leidy, I loved the conversation with you. Thank you.

Leidy ([34:00](#)):

Of course. Likewise.

MBS ([34:00](#)):

I've got a final question, which is, what needs to be said that hasn't yet been said in this conversation between us?





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

I think we've hit on all the important stuff as it relates to Subtract. I don't think there's something that I would put in there that deserves more attention than the things you drew us to. So maybe I'll just leave it with go enjoy the World Cup, and [inaudible 00:34:27].

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

Go Australia, and go Canada.

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

Go Canada.

MBS ([34:31](#)):

I've got two countries in the-

Leidy ([34:32](#)):

That's true, yeah. Canada, that'll be interesting.

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

It is. Yeah, we're pretty excited. I mean, Australia snuck in. It was, I think, the last team to qualify. But Canada topped the American group. We're hoping for good things from Canada.

Leidy ([34:49](#)):

What's the attitude in Canada about this?

MBS ([34:51](#)):

I mean, it's great.

Leidy ([34:51](#)):

Is there excitement?



MBS ([34:52](#)):

There is excitement. And Canada's got a bunch of other sports that normally take top billing, like hockey and basketball. But I think at the moment there's a real... And because Canada is such a multinational country-

Leidy ([35:07](#)):

That's true, you've got a lot of... Yeah.

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

World Cups are normally great, because in Toronto where I live there's Little Portugal, there's Little Italy, there's Little Brazil. I mean, we've got all these places, so it's a vibrant time. But now you're going to see people with Chilean and Canadian flags on their cars as they drive by, so it'll be great.

Leidy ([35:27](#)):

Yeah. And that's why when I say go watch the World Cup, that's not me as a soccer fan, that's me as a citizen of the world. It's such a cool way to see all the other cultures.

MBS ([35:42](#)):

We are not wired to subtract. And I'm making the connection, and this is definitely connected. I wonder if we're also not wired to say no. We want to add, we want to say yes. But there's always a price for adding. There are prizes and punishments for subtracting too, of course. But often we seem to be less conscious of the prizes and punishments for adding on. We just keep thinking, "Sure, I can top this up." What was powerful for me I think in this conversation was the reminder that if you want to get into the flow state, the flow state being that state that the psychologist Csikszentmihalyi named for when you're at your best, when you're accessing your genius, when deep work comes easy, when time speeds up and slows down.

[\(36:33\)](#):



Well, as Leidy said, if you want to access that space, that zone, that moment, it often requires subtraction. In other words, when you don't have the discipline, the focus, and the courage, and the bravery to make the choices to remove the unnecessary and the extraneous, well that gets in the way of you being your best self, doing your best work, and unlocking your genius.

[\(37:02\):](#)

A couple of interviews to suggest if you liked this one. You can build on insights from here. Andrea Small, who has written a great book on ambiguity. She's part of the d.school in Stanford. That interview is called A Beginner's Guide to Ambiguity. And David Noer, a friend of mine, a consultant, talks about freedom in constraints. You can see playing with these parameters of design all through these interviews. If you want more of Leidy Klotz, the best place to go is just go straight to his website, [LeidyKlotz.com](http://LeidyKlotz.com). I'll spell that for you, because it's a name. Not as complicated as Bungay Stanier, but still. Leidy, L-E-I-D-Y, Klotz, K-L-O-T-Z, or Z, depending on where you are in the world. Leidy Klotz, all one word, .com.

[\(37:51\):](#)

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