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

One of my favorite smells is wood smoke, and specifically eucalyptus wood burning while I'm sitting around a fire in the Australian bush. It always, for me, conjures awe. Because I've just read Dacher Keltner's new book on Awe, I can actually give you a definition of what that means, the feeling of being present to something vast that transcends your current understanding of the world. But starting a fire is a delicate thing, a fragile moment. You need to collect twigs and small bits of wood, maybe scrunch up some paper, spark the flame, that first touch of heat and light and then hold it out of the wind, apply it, hope it catches. And if it does, you nourish it. You feed it wood, you blow on it to feed it oxygen. It builds, it strengthens, it finds its form. And then at a certain point, it becomes robust. And for me, in that moment, it becomes that invitation to awe. And of course, when I say building a fire, I'm speaking literally, and I'm also speaking metaphorically.



[\(01:11\)](#):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book. Now when I say brilliant people, Ozan Varol is literally a rocket scientist, but that's just been one of his careers so far, and more on that on a moment. His latest book, *Awaken Your Genius*, has just been released, hence my building the fire introduction. He's also my latest podcast whose roots are in Turkey. You might remember my conversation with Ayse Birsal, the wonderful designer and the *Design the LONG Life You Love*. I'm always curious because I am one as well. What's remembered and missed by immigrants?

Ozan [\(01:55\)](#):

Turkish people are so beautiful and so hospitable, so warm, and so community-oriented. That was one of the pieces that I really missed about Turkey. The absence of community was really apparent in the United States in so many ways, like people lived in these little boxes and disconnected from their neighbors and disconnected from their community.

MBS [\(02:21\)](#):

Ozan's been drawn to search for community wherever he went and he has a unique way of naming and framing what kind of community he wants to be immersed in.

Ozan [\(02:30\)](#):

Not with like-minded people, but with like-hearted people. So not with people who think the same way that I do who share my thoughts, but who have my values of transparency and generosity and kindness and open-mindedness.



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

Over the years, Ozan has been searching for that community in a range of different places and professions. At 17, arriving in the States, Ozan had two suitcases and the determination to find a starting point to be a rocket scientist.

Ozan ([03:02](#)):

I ended up majoring in astrophysics in college and served on the operations team for the Mars Exploration Rovers project, which sent two rovers to Mars, it's been an opportunity back in 2003. And then I did a pivot and I've done a bunch of these pivots in my life and I lost interest in physics and I became more interested in the physics of society, how human beings operate and how they think and ended up going to law school.

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

Practicing law wasn't for Ozan. I understand that, same for me. So unlike me, he became a professor. And yet much like his other endeavors so far, professing law wasn't a great fit. Something important was missing. He wasn't showing up entirely as himself. But for this, Ozan had a perfect example to look back on during his time in the Mars Rover community.

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

One of my professors at Cornell, his name is Steve Squyres, he's an astronomy professor and he is the professor that was the principal investigator for this Mars mission that I ended up working on, and so I worked really closely with him. He defied all sorts of stereotypes. He was this larger than life character. And even though he's in this really complicated technical field of astronomy, he'd wear cowboy boots. You could hear when he was around because you would hear the cowboy boots first coming down the hallway before he actually showed up. He was so friendly and so open and so receptive to feedback from anybody. I mean, I started working on the mission when I was a freshman in college and he was this really famous person who'd just been put in charge of this incredibly



important mission to Mars. But he was open to feedback from anyone. So I could ask him questions and he would lean in and listen and engage with me versus saying like, "You don't know what you're talking about."

[\(05:00\)](#):

I remember when I first started working for him, he had gotten some award. I don't remember what it was for. So he has this award and his name is imprinted on it. He scratched out his name and gave it to the two people who had helped him on the mission and presented the award to them saying, "This is really a testament to your genius and your generosity in working for the mission." They were the people behind the person. Steve thought that they were more deserving of the award. And that really stuck with me too, in terms of being so humble that you're not going to keep this important thing for yourself, but you're also going to pass it on and recognize the generosity, the contributions of other people who helped you.

MBS [\(05:50\)](#):

When was the moment you first claimed your genius? Not just when you were smart, because you were born smart, but you stepped into your genius in this more fulsome definition that you're working with now.

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

Yeah, a moment dropped to mind in my head. I'll tell you a little bit of a backstory to make sense of that moment. So one of the things, and I didn't mention this in response to your question, Michael, of what left its imprint on me from growing up in Turkey. I mentioned that the importance of community, but one of the things that came with the importance of community, especially in the education system, was an emphasis on conformity. So conformity to community norms and standards. And so stripping away your individuality and really creating this conformist way of living, which was really at odds with the way that I functioned in life.



(06:48):

And so I'll give you an example. When we were in primary school, each student was assigned a number. Kind of like in Stranger Things, the Netflix show, like 11. Our principal would call us by that number as opposed to our first name. So it was like a way of branding someone, stripping away their individuality completely and instead assigning them a number. I had really long hair. I was channeling my inner Einstein. I thought haircuts were a giant waste of time. During an assembly, the principal noticed my longer than standard hairdo and he pulled me up on stage and he grabbed the hair clip from one of the students in my class and he stuck the hair clip in my hair to shame me publicly as a sort of this retribution for non-conformity. And shame for Turks is worse than death. I never skipped a haircut again.

(07:42):

And so I turned into this like octopus of sorts. I would observe obsessively what was normal, and then I would change my colors to shift and fit and blend into the background. I even changed my own favorite color. So when people would ask me, "What's your favorite color?" instead of revealing the truth, which would've been purple, I-

MBS (08:03):

My favorite color too.

Ozan (08:04):

Oh, that's awesome. Yeah.

MBS (08:05):

There we go. I knew we like together.



Ozan ([08:07](#)):

That's awesome. I love that, yeah. Instead of telling them the truth, I would say blue and I would say blue because blue is what normal boys were supposed to like and I really, really wanted to be normal. And so it's been this lifelong journey of getting back in touch with my purple. And so, one of the moments, to go back to your question of when that started to come through, and the moment that popped to mind was my now wife, Kathy and I, this must have been our third or fourth date. So we had just met each other and we're having dinner. She looked at me and she asked, "What's your favorite color?" I was about to blurt out blue, but I swallowed my words and returned to myself and I said, "Purple, I really love purple." And she looked at me and she smiled, one of her gorgeous infectious smiles and she said, "Funny. Ever since I was a kid, I thought I'd marry a boy whose favorite color is purple." And I knew I finally, finally [inaudible 00:09:11]-

MBS ([09:11](#)):

Wow. What a story. That's so fantastic.

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

Yeah. And so this lifeline journey of getting back in touch with my purple and just reminding myself through my book, the readers too, that your purple is really important. Your purple becomes the reason why people choose you over others, why, if you're a business, top talent picks you over the competition, why people talk about you, why people buy from you. And so leaning into the purple is really the best way of awakening your genius.

MBS ([09:39](#)):

What does it take to be able to return to yourself? That's the phrase you use. It's like, "I was going to say blue, but I returned to myself and I said purple." What permission do you need? What courage do you need? How do you do that? Because you can see people who manage to do that and you admire them, but



sometimes you can feel like, "I don't know how to make that leap myself. I don't need to take that risk myself." What does it take?

Ozan ([10:10](#)):

For sure. I'll mention two things. The first is this realization that no one can compete with you at being you. You're the first and the last time that you'll ever happen. And if you're thinking is an extension of you, if what you're producing is a product of your own genius, of your own purple, then you'll be in the league of your own. But if you suppress your purple, if you suppress your genius, if you don't claim it, then that will be lost both to you and to the world. So it all begins with that realization. We all have this unique purple, unique genius within us, and it will die with you if you don't claim it.

([10:54](#)):

Number two, and I talk about a number of different strategies in the book, but one of the things that was really helpful for me is asking myself, "What did I enjoy?" I love this quote from Anthony Gaudy, the Catalan architect. He says, "Originality consists of returning to the origin." I think that has a number of different implications, but the way that I want to use it here is, "What is your origin story? What did you enjoy doing as a child before schools cured you of curiosity, before people started to tell you what you should like, what you should be interested in, what you should be curious about?" Because what made you weird or different as a kid can make you extraordinary as an adult.

MBS ([11:40](#)):

Wow.

Ozan ([11:40](#)):

So there's so much value in tapping into and reconnecting with those faint memories and then using them as inspiration for what you do now. For me, just to give an example from my life if people are wondering, "Well, how do you



reconnect with your origin story?", one of the first things I did after I learned to read and write was my grandfather had this typewriter, and I have a typewriter over there actually just as sort of a-

MBS ([12:06](#)):

Nice. I see that, yeah.

Ozan ([12:08](#)):

... as a way to harken back to that moment. When I started to read and write, one of the first things I did not for school, just out of my own internal drive, was to write stories. So I'd sit in front of this typewriter and I would write screenplays and stories. I started this magazine and my parents were the only readers. But I'd just sit there and I'd just write because that's what I wanted to do. And then I lost touch with that part of me, the storyteller. And then as part of this journey of becoming an author and speaking on stage so frequently, I've learned to reconnect with that part of myself and use stories as a way to convey ideas because we're storytelling creatures. Stories stick in a way that isolated bare principles don't. And so I've learned to tap into those memories of what drove me as a kid and use them as inspiration for what I do now.

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

What's the price you've paid for being a genius? Because it's easy to talk up the reward, but every choice you make has prizes and punishments. So I see the prizes, you don't want to die with the purple inside you. But what's the punishment? What's the cost of that?

Ozan ([13:31](#)):

Yeah. The cost is headaches, existential crises, and really, really confused friends and family members is how I would sum that up. Maybe I'll just focus on the really, really confused friends and family members. Part of my journey of awakening my genius, and I actually devote a whole section to this in the book



called Metamorphosis and Transformation, is continuously re-imagining what I'm doing, my own identity and my own profession and my own career. When I decided to leave, for example, my tenured position at the law school where I used to teach, my colleagues, they were just like-

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

Madness.

Ozan ([14:18](#)):

"Madness! You're out of your mind," right?

MBS ([14:20](#)):

Yeah.

Ozan ([14:20](#)):

"You've got a guaranteed paycheck for life. Why would you do that?" And to them, almost to some of them at least, it became a judgment on the choices that they had made, the fact that I was leaving this [inaudible 00:14:36]-

MBS ([14:36](#)):

That's a key insight, I think. Yeah.

Ozan ([14:38](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. So yeah, it became this judgment. At least some of them took it as a judgment on them, and they suffered connections with me. And so I lost some friends in the process, people who were really, really close to me. But the moment I stopped, the moment I abandoned that identity, they disappeared from my life. But as I write in the book, the thing that I try to remind myself is often when you do awaken your genius and you do step into who you truly are, you become a beacon for people. You become an example for other people to follow. People don't want to do that. So if they can't wrap



their head around your transformation, I think that's their problem and not yours. But again, we don't want to gloss over the reality of it, and the reality is that it can be really hard.

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

Yeah. Ozan, what book have you chosen to read for us?

Ozan ([15:39](#)):

I chose Big Magic-

MBS ([15:39](#)):

Classic Liz Gilbert's.

Ozan ([15:41](#)):

Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert.

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

Yeah, I mean I saw her Ted Talk, I think it was after Eat Pray Love, and she's like, "I'm currently working on the deeply disappointing follow up to Eat Pray Love," which is like nothing will be as big as that book. But I think with Big Magic, you might have written a book that was as big as Eat Pray Love. It's a different genre. But when did the book come into your life?

Ozan ([16:06](#)):

It came into my life shortly after... This must have been maybe seven years ago, shortly after I started to think about branching outside of academia to write for non-academic audiences. I had also seen that Ted Talk you mentioned, Michael. It had really struck me. I think I looked up the book that she had mentioned in the Ted Talk. I think this is after Eat Pray Love, because she normally writes fiction.



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

Yes.

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

It's a non-fiction book on creativity and creative living. But it's, I think, so much more than that. It's really about living a creative life in general. So even if you're not a writer or an artist or a musician, I think there's so much in this book about how to reimagine yourself and how to reimagine the status quo. It's one of my favorites on creativity of all time.

MBS ([17:01](#)):

That's fantastic. How did you decide what pages to read for us?

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

I skimmed through the book about a week ago, and I was looking through my own highlights in the book. And this section just jumped out of me and I thought, "You know, this would be a really fun one to read and talk about." So yeah, that's how I picked it.

MBS ([17:27](#)):

I love it. And I'm just noticing the connection between the cover of your book, which is filled with color, and the cover of her book, which is also filled with cover. So there's a way that the two books dance together in a really nice way.

Ozan ([17:40](#)):

Yeah, for sure. I actually hadn't made that connection before. Thank you for that. I love that.

MBS ([17:42](#)):

Yeah. Ozan reading Liz Gilbert's *Big Magic*, over to you.



Ozan ([17:49](#)):

This is a short section called Originality versus Authenticity.

([17:53](#)):

"Maybe you fear that you are not original enough. Maybe that's a problem. You're worried that your ideas are commonplace in pedestrian and therefore unworthy of creation. Aspiring writers will often tell me, 'I have an idea, but I'm afraid it's already been done.' Well, yes, it probably has already been done. Most things have already been done, but they have not yet been done by you. By the time Shakespeare was finished with his run on life, he pretty much covered every storyline there is, but that hasn't stopped nearly five centuries of writers from exploring the same storylines all over again. And remember, many of those stories were already cliches long before even Shakespeare got his hands on. When Picasso saw the ancient Cave paintings at Lascaux, he reportedly said, 'We have learned nothing in 12,000 years,' which is probably true, but so what?"

([18:57](#)):

"So what if we repeat the same things? So what if we circle around the same ideas again and again, generation after generation? So what if every new generation feels the same urges and asks the same questions that humans have been feeling and asking for years? We're all related after all. So there is going to be some repetition of creative instincts. Everything reminds us of something. But once you put your own expression and passion behind an idea, that idea becomes yours. Anyhow, the older I get, the less impressed I become with originality. These days, I'm far more moved by authenticity. Attempts at originality can often feel forced and precious, but authenticity has quite resonance that never fails to stir. Just say what you want to say then and say it with all your heart. Share what you are driven to share. If it's authentic enough, believe me, it will feel original."

MBS ([20:09](#)):

What did that passage give you permission to do or to be?



Ozan ([20:16](#)):

That passage came into my life when I was paralyzed by this feeling, this assumption that as I was branching into this different type of writing, that whatever I wrote had to be completely new. And so then I come up with an idea, I'm like, "Oh, this would be a great idea for a blog post." And then you sit down and to write it and you look up sort of like what's been written on, somebody else already covered it. Or I would have a book idea and somebody else already wrote a book on that topic.

([20:50](#)):

And so it just became this never ending chase of this originality unicorn that just didn't exist. That passage gave me permission to say, "It doesn't matter that it's been covered before." So it doesn't matter that someone before you wrote *The Coaching Habit*, Michael, that someone wrote another book on coaching.

MBS ([21:13](#)):

That's right.

Ozan ([21:13](#)):

Or it didn't matter when I wrote *Think Like a Rocket Scientist* that so many people had written books on scientific thinking. Or it didn't matter when I wrote *Awaken Your Genius* that other people had written books on non-conformity and creativity or generating original ideas. That passage gave me the permission to say, "Regardless of any of that, as long as I am writing what's true to me, as long as I'm bringing my own unique perception, unique ideas, my own purple to this context, whatever it might be, then it will feel original."

MBS ([21:50](#)):

I often use the phrase, "What I do is old wine in new bottles," and I'm like, "You know what? I'm working hard on the bottles." I mean, Socrates made a pretty good start on the whole power of questioning sometime ago. So I can't really



claim any originality in that space, but the way I'm trying to serve it up to the world, I'm like, "This is my best attempt at giving you old wisdom from where I stand and where I sit at the moment."

Ozan ([22:18](#)):

Yeah, exactly. And I think the best works do that. They marry the old with the new in some fashion. So when people read, it's not entirely new, which I think would be jarring. They're recognizing some old ideas in there, but as you put it beautifully, it's old wine in a new bottle and they're seeing the new bottle and they're seeing the issue from a very different perspective, from a different statement, like for example, "Embrace your purple," right?

MBS ([22:43](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Ozan ([22:43](#)):

When I share that idea, that often sticks with people.

MBS ([22:45](#)):

Exactly, yeah.

Ozan ([22:47](#)):

But that's a new bottle on an old wine. The old wine of embracing your creativity, what makes you different.

MBS ([22:52](#)):

That's right.

Ozan ([22:53](#)):

It's been around for a very long time, but what I'm putting around it is a new bottle.



MBS ([22:59](#)):

How do you discover what authentic is? Because authentic is slippery.

Ozan ([23:08](#)):

Right.

MBS ([23:08](#)):

There's a sense that we're constantly learning and evolving and growing. And if you think of us as emergent beings at our best, we keep getting more complex. Every time a new neural pathway forms in our brain, our complexity increases. As we gain experiences and collect scars and collect stories, we merge into this next best version of who we are. This tension between being authentic, which has a degree of, "This is the essential. Keep it pure and emergent. I'm growing into something new," there's a tension between that. And I'm just curious to know how you think about that tension, how you manage that, and how you know when you're being authentic and when you're fake or being authentic.

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

Yeah, for sure. And that can be a difficult balance to strike. For me, authentic doesn't mean you don't change. For me, authentic means staying true to who you are at the moment, so today. Writing was true to you. Ernest Hemingway had this advice for writer's block. He would say something like, "If you get stuck, just write one true sentence." That's that. One true sentence. I would modify that by saying write one true sentence for today. So what feels true to you today? Not two years ago, three years ago.

([24:38](#)):

And so when I was writing *Awaken Your Genius*, I actually struggled with this because my initial instinct was my last book, *Think Like A Rocket Scientist*, was successful and my initial instinct was to imitate, to look back at what made it successful, and then copy. Copy the same structure, the same formula, the



same three parts and nine chapters, same everything. And for the first time in my life, I got writer's block. Just words like stopped flowing, creativity stopped coming, and I couldn't write anything for a month or so. And so I had to just set aside all plans, all structures, all formulas from the past and look at myself, look at what I believe today, look at the type of book that I wanted to write today. What would be authentic to me today, and started writing it.

[\(25:28\)](#):

The writing process was very, very different from the last one. The last one I had the title picked, the outline set, everything was already set. This one, it was the exact opposite. It was instead of a top down process, it was a bottom up process where I built the individual puzzle pieces first. Not necessarily knowing what type of puzzle they would add up to, but I started with the puzzle pieces, sort of leaning into what I was curious about and what was coming up on a day-to-day basis and then just saw what they added up to over time. And once I let go of what resonated for me three years ago and what resonated with my audience three years ago and stepped into what I thought and felt today, that's when the creativity flow opened up.

MBS [\(26:12\)](#):

There's something interesting about you wrote Think Like a Rocket Scientist like a rocket scientist. "Here's the structure. Here's the substructure. Here's the sub-structure. Now add the words into the sub substructure." And you wrote this book by the sound of things like, "I'm on my quest for purple here." More emergent, more exploratory, more creative. So the medium was the message.

Ozan [\(26:37\)](#):

Absolutely. Yeah, that's a really beautiful reflection. I hadn't thought of it that way, but yeah, that's absolutely right. I set aside the rocket scientist who wrote the Rocket Science book and stepped into the person I am today and wrote the book that I wrote.



MBS ([26:57](#)):

Whose approval are you looking for with this book?

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

God, that's such a great question. This is an ongoing struggle.

MBS ([27:07](#)):

Exactly. I'm asking for a friend of mine, a friend of mine called Michael.

Ozan ([27:11](#)):

Yeah, right. Exactly. Initially during the writing process, I think of one person when I write, and that's my wife Kathy. And so I'm writing for this audience of one. The approval is also internal. In many ways, I wrote the book that I wish I could have read 10 years ago. It really was self help in that sense. I was writing to help myself and the former version of myself and I would picture Kathy when I was writing certain chapters just to have a concrete audience member in mind.

([27:48](#)):

But now that the book has been finished, and we're recording this on February 23rd, so about two months before the launch, now we've got publicists and marketers and all of these other people in the mix, and the launch is coming up, the approval needle shifts to external metrics. It gets pushed over there. Whenever it gets pushed over there, all the delights and joy leaves the room.

MBS ([28:16](#)):

Yeah, I totally get that.

Ozan ([28:18](#)):

It all leaves the room, right?

MBS ([28:19](#)):



Yeah.

Ozan ([28:19](#)):

Because now you've forgotten about the creative part and why you wrote the book in the first place and you're focusing on these metrics and outcomes and pre-order numbers and everything else. So this is why it's a constant struggle. It's a constant struggle to remind myself, and there's actually a chapter about this in the book where I pulled it up and reread it, like I said, the book is self-help in many ways, about external metrics. The book mentions, for example, that Glenn Close was nominated for the Academy Award eight times and she never won. Jason Alexander famous for playing Costanza on Seinfeld, he was nominated for an Emmy eight times and he never won. Isaac Asimov. He wrote 261 consecutive non bestsellers. So he didn't hit the New York Times Bestseller List, and this is not a mistake. He didn't hit the New York Times Bestseller List until his 262nd book.

MBS ([29:20](#)):

My God.

Ozan ([29:21](#)):

And by the way, he wrote that many books. Setting that aside.

MBS ([29:24](#)):

Goodness. Yeah.

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

But does that mean that Glenn Close and Jason Alexander are bad actors or that as Asimov's first 261 books all sucked? Of course not. I think they can't control how academy members vote. Asimov cannot control how many copies of his book sell. The more we focus on external metrics and external approval, the more we strive for guaranteed success in a way that I was trying to do with the



writing of this book initially. The more we strive for guaranteed success is the less original we become because we fear failure and so we try to do the thing that we think is going to land safely and is going to work. And that, I think, robs us of authenticity in many ways.

[\(30:12\)](#):

So external approval is like, and I try to remind myself again, being where I am right now, it's like relying on fossil fuels to generate our energy. The stuff is not renewable, it doesn't burn clean. You constantly need more doses of it. When it's done, you need more. When it's done, you need more. Internal approval. Approval from within is like renewable energy sources, right? That stuff burns clean and you have an infinite supply of it from within. And as long as you've got that to tap into, you don't need the more polluting, the more scarce external approval.

MBS [\(30:50\)](#):

So I get that in theory and in practice. How are you measuring success for this book? You're two months out. For people who've never launched a book before, two months out is like it's the darkest time because you're doing a bazillion things. You're asking favors of people, you're knocking on doors and it's all... You're not sure how any of it's going because at the moment there's no feedback, there's no bounce back, there's no sense of where you are in the process. You're just putting your stuff out into the world. So in my experience, it can be quite depleting. And when you're being depleted like that, you are more vulnerable to the, "Will it hit a number? Will it hit a list? Will it hit a degree of approval from somebody?" So how do you talk about success for this new book, Ozan?

Ozan [\(31:47\)](#):

Yeah, great question. Two ideas came to mind in terms of what I'm doing on a day-to-day basis, because you're right, this can be a really dark period of time



when you're just constantly putting yourself out there and not getting the constant pat on the back of like, "Good job. You did great." So I'm doing two things. One, I actually find myself going back to the book and rereading parts of it for myself as reminders to myself of why I wrote it and reconnecting with the joy of writing it too. So that's a really important part for me. Writers often complain about the writing process process. I enjoyed, I would say. 90% of writing this book.

MBS ([32:27](#)):

That's a high batting average.

Ozan ([32:29](#)):

Yeah. And so reconnecting with the delight that I was giving myself as I wrote the book and realizing that as long as I had fun along the way, as long as I delighted myself, as long as I learned things in the process, the outcome, by reference to external metrics, loses some of its relevance because now you're just focused on the process and you're reminding yourself that you enjoyed the journey.

([32:53](#)):

And then the second bit, and I know this is more external facing but it's been an important reminder for me. So I gave talks based on the book already to three of them, three of them. It landed so well with the audience. I got standing ovations.

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

Nice.

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

So many people came up to me after the talk just to tell me how the concepts in the talk resonated and really helped them come to certain realizations in their lives. So whenever I lose sight, I just go back to the way that I felt on stage,



delivering the material to that audience and how I was coming alive and then the process the audience was coming alive. So in moments of confusion, I close my eyes, I'm like I'm back on that stage and I can see the faces of the audience and remember how I felt and remember how most of them felt.

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

I've been wrestling with this with my small team because a few months after your book, my new book will come out. One of the things that's helping me at the moment, I'm saying this for you, but I'm saying this for people listening as well, is we've set a mission for the book launch, which isn't about book sales. It's to improve 10 million working relationships. Having that external mission gives an external purpose. It's like impossible to actually measure. I'm like, I don't know how to get to 10 million working relationships. It feels not utterly... Maybe it's a bit like trying to land a rover on Mars. It's like I think we might be able to do this, but it's going to take a whole lot of figuring out and a whole lot of people working hard for some years to get there.

([34:38](#)):

And just having 10 million working relationships as the language we talk about in terms of what we're trying to achieve with the book feels like it relieves pressure around the minutia and the selfishness of a book launch, which is like, "I want this book to do well because I want to do well. I want to be famous. I want to be a blah, blah, Times Bestseller. I want all of that." And I'm trying to, not always successfully, but trying to sit with that a little bit and see how it goes.

Ozan ([35:06](#)):

I love that. And I love that you picked something that's not... Because everything is so focused on book sales in the beat up to the launch, a metric that's really meaningful, that has a really important purpose embedded into it, and that goes beyond bestseller lists and sales numbers. I think that's really beautiful.

([35:25](#)):



One more thing I wanted to mention on point here is that we often assume that something has to make a big splash to make a difference in the world. Like you need a big bestseller or you need to write a book about something that's going to reach millions of people. But it's often those small actions that create ripple effects that extend outward. And often we don't notice them, so we assume they don't exist. We assume that ripple effect doesn't exist because you can't see it. Whereas you can see the front page of the New York Times, or you can see the sales numbers and you think those are what matters. But those little things where you change one working relationship with your next book, Michael.

MBS ([36:14](#)):

Yeah. Exactly.

Ozan ([36:14](#)):

And then that has this ripple effect of like, by changing that working relationship, that will have an effect on other working relationships in that environment. And then it will ripple out from there to distances in relationships that you can't even fathom or see because those people may not be buying your book. But someone read it, someone was influenced by it, someone changed their relationship, and as a result, they affected so many lives in the process.

MBS ([36:40](#)):

When you talked about your journey, moving from Turkey, but rocket scientist, and then I'm like, "I'm maybe done with that" and then law school and being a lawyer and then, "I'm quite sure I'm done with that." And then being a law professor and like, "Hey, I think I'm done with that," what our joint friend Whitney Johnson recall is like this movement through S-curves, there's rush at the bottom, you climb up towards mastery, you hit that next top level that you start to plateau. How do you stay alive to the work you're doing now? How do you stop that becoming the next thing you get bored of?



Ozan ([37:23](#)):

Sure. On a day-to-day basis, that means leaning into what's driving my curiosity, what's interesting to me, what am I curious about, what do I want to explore right now. And if you look at the professions that I left, I had come in each instance to the end of my exploration, to the end of my curiosity.

([37:44](#)):

And so just to give the most recent example of leaving academia and my job as a law professor. And I did think when I first started that I'd be a law professor for life. But I remember each time I stepped in front of the podium to give a lecture, I would come alive. When I first started teaching, it was this moment of just being alive and being so excited to deliver the material. And then I remember... I don't remember when this was, but I did the same walk in front of the podium. I stood there and I noticed this sinking feeling, this feeling of constriction, this feeling of like, "I can't believe I'm about to teach the same material now for the 25th time." That feeling was a signal to me that I might be coming to the end of that particular journey, that I had maybe reached the level, the plateau of there is nothing else for me to learn here.

([38:45](#)):

I mean, there might be some marginal learnings here and there, but I've been teaching the same classes for years and years and years and answering the same types of stewing questions and attending the same types of committee meetings. And so I had come to the natural end of that journey. If I hadn't stepped into the next thing of what was making me curious and interested, I think I would've lost myself and I also would've ended up being a terrible professor because a lot of... And you see this with a lot of academics, is like they do the same thing for all of their life, and then at the end, towards the end, once they've reached that plateau point, they started to decline. I wanted to leave on



good terms. I wanted to leave when I was still good at what I did and then step into the next thing that I was curious about.

MBS ([39:37](#)):

You talked about noticing that sinking feeling, and I'm a heady person. I like ideas. You're a rocket scientist, so by definition, et cetera, et cetera. There's always so much wisdom in your body, in that somatic form. How have you learned to listen to what is going on beyond just the ideas in your brain?

Ozan ([40:04](#)):

I remember the day. I was in Dublin to give a keynote and I had some time off. There was this farm nearby the hotel where I was staying where they had skeet shooting. So they would shoot these clay targets and you'd try to shoot them and I was like, "Oh, I don't have anything else to do and I've never done this before, so let me just go try it out and see how it goes." So I went to this place and the target was shoot up and I would operate from here. I'm calculating velocity, pitch, and distance and trying to figure out when to pull the trigger and I just kept missing. I would just keep missing and missing and missing and missing one after the other. The instructor took pity on me. He came over and he looked at me and he said, "You're overthinking it." And I was like, "I have no other mode of thinking available."

MBS ([40:58](#)):

Yeah. It's like, "There's nothing left after [inaudible 00:41:00]."

Ozan ([41:00](#)):

There's nothing left. It's just overthinking or not thinking at all. And then he said, and this is advice that I still remember to this day, he said, "Follow your body. Your mind is getting in the way." He said, "Pull the trigger when you feel like it's the right moment, not when you think it is." So I was like, "Okay, I'll give it a shot." The clay target launched again, and this time I just totally shut out my



overcalculating brain. I leaned into my body and I pulled the trigger when I felt like it was the right time, and I nailed the thing that time. And it was like, "Okay, such validation from the universe. So yeah, maybe this is important to do."

[\(41:41\)](#):

And then that sent me on this reflection, this self reflective journey of I remembered all the times in my life when I overthought and over recalculated and ignore the signals from my body. My body in my guts, and this is the language we normally use, I knew in my guts that I shouldn't do business with this person, but they looked great on paper. And if you do pros and cons lists, you should absolutely do it and it ended up being a terrible deal. Or I knew in my heart that I shouldn't hire this person, but I hired them anyway because they look great on paper. It ended up being a speaking or working relationships. It ended up being a terrible working relationship.

[\(42:22\)](#):

The goal isn't to ignore the mind, it's to align the mind with the body. And for most of us, I think that also means just learning to listen to the signals that the body is sending you on a moment to moment basis. And that feeling changes for everybody. The example that I gave that you alluded to was that feeling of sinking and suffocation that I felt. And then the feeling of expansion and aliveness and listening to those signals and following them becomes really, really important, because as you said, the body is from an evolutionary perspective, ancient. Your mind is a really powerful machine, but it arrived on the scene in the grand scheme of things yesterday. The body carries millions of years of ancient wisdom and we often ignore that wisdom because we're too stuck with our minds.

MBS [\(43:18\)](#):

Ozan's clay pigeon story reminds me of playing soccer last weekend. Now, I get together most Sunday mornings in the winter with a bunch of other old dish dudes like me. We get assigned teams and we do our best basically not to get



injured for a couple of hours. Now, truth is I've been on a good role lately. I mean, not only have I not got injured, but I've been playing as well as I can. I've been running hard. I've even been scoring some goals, which is nothing short of miraculous. But last Sunday, I was playing terribly. I was never in the right place. When I was and got the ball, I'd make a bad pass. Or once or twice I even tried to kick it and missed it completely, which is embarrassing and actually never really happens. I could feel myself tensing up and actually just getting snippy with myself, just kind of berating myself. My mind, like Ozan when in Ireland, was getting in my own way.

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

Now, I'm not sure exactly how Ozan just shut out his overcalculating mind, that's the language he used. But for me, I found the way to do that was with a mantra, and my mantra was, calm, calm, calm. I just kept saying that word to myself. I was trying to deescalate my body, and from that to deescalate my mind. Now in truth, I didn't actually get much better. I was still pretty much off my game. It was just one of those days. But I did get much better in enjoying the moment, enjoying being there. I was there to have fun with my friends. I didn't really need to hit the target. I just had to be present in my body, calm.

[\(45:02\)](#):

If you like my conversation with Ozan and a couple of other interviews, you can dig back into our archives and see if you can find. I know we don't number our interviews. A friend of mine, Susan, hasn't numbered them. It's a little complicated. We may try and figure that out, but it's not going to happen in the next little while. So you have to go and hunt for these. Jay Acunzo, *Making What Matters Most*. Jay is a podcaster and a writer, but some very thoughtful stuff about what it means to create. And Madeleine Dore. I love this interview with Madeline, *How to Be Alive*. She writes one of the best news editors I know. She's a great curator and a great searcher for a life that matters.

[\(45:43\)](#):



If you want more information about Ozan's new book, I'd suggest you go to geniusbook.net. There's bonus content in and around the book launch, so if you're fast enough, you may be able to pick up some of those bonuses. But certainly, if not, go to ozanvarol.com. He's not very active on social. He has a great newsletter though, and I'd encourage you to subscribe to his newsletter. Join me because I read that every week.

[\(46:08\)](#):

Thank you for listening. Thanks for supporting the podcast, for reviewing it if you've reviewed it, for passing an interview on. If you found one and you want to share it with somebody, that's really appreciated. You're awesome and you're doing great.