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MBS (00:00):

Hey, it's Michael here, and my new book is on the near, near horizon. It's called *How to Work with (Almost) Anyone*. And if you interact with other human beings in your life, this might be a helpful book for you. It goes live on June 27 and I've got some terrific pre order bonuses. You'll find those at bestpossiblerelationship.com. I do hope you'll check those out. The audiobook is ready to go as well. I've actually recorded it myself. I did it sitting in this office where I'm recording this voiceover now. And so that it's not just a monologue from me, I've invited some of my friends to share a short story of what they've learned from their best or their worst working relationships.

(00:48):

So this is the last of the episodes featuring my new book, *How to Work with (Almost) Anyone*. It's out now, and thank you for your support so far. This



chapter is about how to reset a relationship that's gone through a tough spell. I mean, I hope this hasn't been a tough spell for you, but it's a nice way to be a segue to getting back to normal programming with some of my fantastic guests. It finishes with a short story from coach and leadership expert Sanyin Siang, who is the winner, actually, of the first Thinkers 50 Coaches Award. Thank you again for your support.

(01:25):

Chapter 18. *Reset as Needed. Ending (and Beginning)*. When my dad was dying, I lived for a time in my childhood home with him and my mum. My parents were a loving couple, but now the relationship was being tested in a new way. Their preemptive grief meant they were both sad and afraid, no longer able to live their lives and run the house the way they had. The stress of the situation, understandably, brought some tension. Nothing terrible, but as their son I didn't want Mum's last memories of her relationship with Dad to have that edge. I proposed that we work through a version of the Keystone Conversation. Suggesting this was in no way natural or easy. We've never particularly been a family for deep, introspective conversations.

(02:22):

And who wants to facilitate their parents in a conversation like this? Not me, that's for sure. My own resistance to this idea was minimal compared to my parents. They were deeply unenthusiastic, but I'm persistent. Dad was the first to come around to it, and eventually Mum did too. Her reluctant agreement was exactly how many of us would feel: "OK, I guess I'm willing to do it. But do I need to be there?" And as an aside, they were both brilliant in the conversation. There are various reasons to reset a relationship. Most obvious might be when you've gone through a crisis and you want to take things back to the studs and rebuild. But conflict is not required.



(03:10):

Sometimes a situation has changed significantly enough - a shift in role or status, for instance- that the two of you need to imagine a new BPR.

Sometimes, the problem is that there *hasn't* been clarifying conflict. Rather, you've settled into what Terry Real, in his book *Fierce Intimacy*, calls "stable ambiguity". Although it's mediocre and uncertain, it's a smidge easier to keep going than to break up. Finally, sometimes the working relationship is ending, and you want to finish it as best you can with grace, appreciation, and dignity. Here are two maintenance questions to help you navigate the end and explore new beginnings. *First question: Should we begin again?* You remember that one power of a Keystone Conversation is that it sets a precedent for talking about how you work together. The state of health of your working relationship, a topic that often feels off limits, can be on the agenda.

(04:19):

After some sort of conflict whether it's a small disturbance on the harmony or a more significant confrontation, the moment is ripe to reset the relationship with what is in effect another Keystone Conversation. Your initial plans have had a run-in with reality. You've still got the shared commitment, but now you've got a bunch of new behaviors, patterns, and interactions to work through. Once again, you're seeking to answer the singular question: What do we need to know about each other so we can reforge a BPR together? You're at a crossroads. Avoid the reset, and the relationship will likely continue to deteriorate. Take the opportunity to plant the seeds of repair and recovery, and you'll likely strengthen it. You've already got tools you can use from the Keystone Conversation section. You might layer in these questions and ways of thinking.

(05:16):

And I've got just some short lists for you here. Stay compassionate (towards them and you). How are you doing? Here's how I'm doing. I found that hard. I found that difficult, upsetting. I found that confusing. How did you find it? Stay



curious (about how you ended up in this place). What's the data, and what did we both make up about what that meant? What spark set this off? What do you wish you'd done differently? Here's what I wish I'd done differently. How would we do a better job with something like this in the future?

(05:57):

Finally, Stay committed (to the BPR and to repair). What would you like to hear from me? Here's what I'd like to hear from you. What needs to be said that hasn't yet been said? What else is needed, so we can begin this again? And here's *the second question: How do we finish this?* Sometimes the decision is not to begin again, but to finish the relationship. Its time is up: something may have been irredeemably broken, or the arc may be complete. All things, BPRs as well, have their season. We don't always get to choose how we depart. I've already mentioned Antigonus in *The Winter's Tale*.

(06:45):

Exit, pursued by a bear, never to reappear, so that probably hasn't ended well. Luckily, you've got more options than Antigonus, so decide how you'd like it to end. Different circumstances will demand different responses. But if you can choose the third option of the ones I'm about to mention as often as possible, you've had the good luck and have done the hard work of a BPR that's been something to celebrate. So option one is "The Ghost". You decide it's not worth the effort, and you disappear without a trace. It's clean and neat on your end, and it's typically frustrating and confusing for the other person.

(07:28):

Number two is "The Cortés". Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés allegedly ordered his boats to be burnt upon arriving on the shores of the Aztec empire. There would be no going back. You may not have boats, but you've got bridges, although not for much longer. You decide that not only is there nothing worth saving here, but you're also going to show some people exactly how you feel



about the experience. And then the third option is “The Wake”. The wake is a great Irish tradition to celebrate a death. There's sorrow and there's celebration.

(08:07):

It's a deliberate gathering to talk about what's past. It's generous, it's safe, it's celebratory. You can shape yours by using some of these questions. I've got five or six here for you. What's the best story you can tell about this BPR? What needs to be celebrated? What do you need to say thank you for? What have you learned? How have you changed and grown? What doesn't need to be said? What can you keep quiet? What does dignity look and sound like? How can both of you “save face”?

(08:46):

Ending. One of the most wonderful books I've read recently is *With The End in Mind* by Kathryn Mannix. She's a British doctor and a cognitive behavioral therapist committed to helping people be less afraid of dying. She covers a lot of ground: most of us are unfamiliar with death and anxious about it, no matter whether we're at the end of our life or if someone who matters to us is dying. Mannix tells sad and mostly joyful stories of how people come to a good death. Thinking about how we face the end of a relationship is not *quite* the same, but I suspect we can apply at least two things from her work. First, the unknown can be the scariest thing. We tend to catastrophize and think the worst; in fact, most endings are quieter and gentler than we realize.

(09:41):

Second, it's helpful to actively manage the experience for all the players in the drama. Yes, hoping it will end well sometimes works, but the process will likely have more generosity, presence, and grace if you think about and shape what happens.



Sanyin (10:02):

Hi, I'm Sanyin Siang, and I am a CEO, coach, advisor and the author of *The Launch Book*. One of my best working relationships was with a former boss of mine. What she did that made it so powerful was that she never shied away from giving me gritty, honest feedback and doing so in a way that demonstrated how much she cared about me. So the impact that had on me was that not only did she empower me, but I felt she was truly invested in me. So what I learned was, going forward, a great way of showing someone, whether it's a friend, a colleague, a teammate, a direct report that you are invested in them, that you care about them, is to give them honest feedback about what they're doing well, as well as what they could be doing better. And to do that from a place of care so that they know the intent is to help them be at their best.

MBS (11:07):

I'm so delighted you've had a taste of *How to Work with (Almost) Anyone*. For more information and bonus resources, go to bestpossiblerelationship.com. If you've got a chance to pick up the book and read it, a review on Amazon or an online source would be fantastic. Thank you for your support of the podcast and of the books. You're awesome and you're doing great.