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

I remember being in New Orleans some years ago, in the main square, or maybe one of the main squares. Anyway, they had people offering to read your palm and tell your future. I mean, I was interested. I'd like to know how the future pans out. So, I picked somebody and I crossed her palm with silver, which I think meant handing over a 20 buck note. Then, she proceeded to provide an amazingly disappointing performance. It was either boring or wrong or cliched, mostly a combination of the three. I mean, I did not get my \$20 worth.

([00:39](#)):

But, what if you could see the future? What would you want to know and what would you not want to know?

([00:48](#)):

Welcome to 2 Pages with MBS, the podcast where brilliant people read the best two pages from a favorite book, a book that has moved them, a book that has shaped them. Jonathan Brill is an author and a speaker, but perhaps he is the



oracle, the oracle that I've been seeking. He is, this is what it says on his business card, a futurist. Certainly, for the first years of his career, he had a real focus around that. He was focused on innovation and what products would shape the future. But then, he accepted a new role in a new organization, which he kind of assumed would be more of the same.

Jonathan ([01:24](#)):

Years ago, HP hired me as their global futurist, and I thought what that meant was that they wanted me to help them figure out what their products should be in the future because that's what I do.

MBS ([01:37](#)):

So, irony alert. Turns out that the future isn't as predictable as you might think because on his first day, Jonathan's role had already changed. HP was going through a massive transformation that went far beyond the scope of future products.

Jonathan ([01:52](#)):

What they needed to figure out was how every aspect of their organization would change over the next decade, so that as they made these transitions, they were prepared to grow over time. So, I ended up building an intelligence network within the company, learning all about economics, learning all about geopolitics, and helping the organization kind of squeeze that into an idea about what they needed to be moving forward, how to make better decisions.

MBS ([02:24](#)):

So, clearly this is a really big expansive role, but for Jonathan, there's a delightfully simple way to define it.



Jonathan ([02:31](#)):

I help organizations, I help individuals, transform to be who they can be to have their best possible future.

MBS ([02:41](#)):

If Jonathan hopping from economics to global politics, to product development, to whatever else a global futurist does, you have to wonder how you'd even prepare for such a role. What does it take to become an oracle of the future where everyone's future is going to be different?

Jonathan ([02:59](#)):

I think this is one of these things where people ask, "How do you become a futurist? Or-

MBS ([02:59](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([03:06](#)):

Like, "What's the career path?" I can only tell you mine, and I can only tell you that once I was hired, I discovered that was on my business card.

MBS ([03:15](#)):

Oh, interesting.

Jonathan ([03:16](#)):

For me, my father's best friend was an industrial designer. He was a very successful toy inventor. So, I discovered you can just kind of-

MBS ([03:16](#)):

Cool.



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

... invent whatever future you want to invent.

MBS ([03:30](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([03:31](#)):

That seemed like a whole lot more fun than being an accountant, to me.

MBS ([03:31](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([03:36](#)):

So, I went down that road and got a degree in industrial design. While I was doing that, I read a book called Future Shock on the power shift-

MBS ([03:36](#)):

A book by Toffler. Right?

Jonathan ([03:46](#)):

... and the third wave-

MBS ([03:46](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([03:47](#)):

... by Alvin Toffler.

MBS ([03:48](#)):

Yeah.



Jonathan ([03:49](#)):

He was kind of the first really great futurist. There's a lot of people who can say they do this for a living, but Alvin's ability to actually frame up what was going to happen next was stunning.

MBS ([04:06](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([04:10](#)):

I've spent the time since then working on product innovation, like I said, but most importantly, helping companies figure out what is that tenure path for their organizations. Occasionally, I get to help individuals do that, too.

MBS ([04:24](#)):

I mean, I love having that seed planted by your father's friend being a toy inventor. What a great eclectic role model to show up. I've never had a toy inventor show up in my life, or at least not in the first 50 years. What skills, in the very broadest sense, do you feel that you accumulated between meeting toy inventor and ending up with a business card with futurist? I mean, there's a saying, "Inspiration is when your past suddenly makes sense."

Jonathan ([04:24](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([05:01](#)):

I'm wondering what parts of your past suddenly made sense when you went, "Oh, this is what I apparently now do."

Jonathan ([05:06](#)):

Yeah. That's a great question. I think one way to think about it's to step down about nine layers to the foundation of knowledge, how we know what we know.



We'll get out of the geek, here, in about five seconds. In philosophy, the study of how we know what we know is called epistemology. There are four major ways we know new things.

[\(05:33\)](#):

We can think like a lawyer, which is deductive thinking. We can think like a scientist, which is inductive thinking, saying, "Given these facts, what's most likely to be true today?"

MBS [\(05:44\)](#):

I've tried the first two and I can't do either of those first two. So, carry on. I'm hoping that one of the remaining two, I can actually do this.

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

The third one is called Bayesian reasoning. This is what economists do, where they say, "Okay. There's this inflation thing. We don't really know how it works, but we know what the inputs are and we know the outputs. So-

MBS [\(06:00\)](#):

Okay. So, I'm zero for three.

Jonathan [\(06:03\)](#):

I started off zero for three, too. Then the last thing, because I think you were also trained as an artist, or a designer, or certainly worked in that-

MBS [\(06:03\)](#):

A little bit.

Jonathan [\(06:03\)](#):

... space for a long time.



MBS ([06:10](#)):

Yeah. Innovation. Yes.

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

Yeah. Is abductive reasoning. So this is asking, "What if something we knew to be true, was not?" Or, "What if something new came to light? How would that change my opinion?" So, this is kind of how the artist thinks. That's how I was trained, and I have really strong skills, there. I learned how to do systems thinking, which is really Bayesian reasoning. Looking at a complex system and saying, "Okay. If we change something in the upper left-hand corner of the Rube Goldberg machine, what happens in the lower right-hand corner?"

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

Yes. Nice. Yeah.

Jonathan ([06:52](#)):

Just because of the innovation work, because there's just so much market research stuff about inductive reasoning, scientific reasoning came forward.

MBS ([07:00](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([07:00](#)):

When I joined HP, my boss was a JD MBA. He was trained as a lawyer and an MBA. The guy was the rigorous deductive-

MBS ([07:10](#)):

Right.



Jonathan ([07:10](#)):

... thinker. "Everything must be mutually exclusive, completely exhaustive. There must be a search path that gets you to this answer. You've got to be able to prove the theorem."

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

Yeah.

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

All of that stuff you were supposed to learn in math class, that I certainly didn't, he drilled that in. So, I think what I do well today, is I have a smattering of each of these things. I'm not a master of all, but I know when I'm missing a piece of the toolkit to understand what happens next. I have a huge network of people I can draw on to ask this question, or that question. So the point is, if you want to master all four of these, you'd need four master's degrees. But, you don't need that if you understand the shape of the question, the shape of what's missing from your understanding of the future, or your understanding of a new problem. What you need is help.

MBS ([08:13](#)):

What do you mean by "understanding the shape of the question?" That's an intriguing phrase.

Jonathan ([08:22](#)):

We're about to go deeper into the epistemological world.

MBS ([08:25](#)):

Well, I'm geeking out with you on this. So, anybody who's not going to geek out, now's the time to stop listening because we're going to be here for another three or four minutes, at least.



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

And, I'm about to invoke Donald Rumsfeld, unfortunately.

MBS ([08:39](#)):

Oh, okay.

Jonathan ([08:40](#)):

So, he got nailed-

MBS ([08:40](#)):

You don't know what you don't know?

Jonathan ([08:41](#)):

Yeah. ... by the media during the US/Iraq War for talking about, "What we know, we know. What we know, we don't know. What we don't know, we don't know.

And, what-

MBS ([08:53](#)):

I thought that was unfair. I thought that was like, "That's actually a useful way of seeing the world."

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

It's been profound for me.

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

Why?

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

First of all, when you just make that list, it becomes really clear where the holes are-



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

Right.

Jonathan ([09:07](#)):

... and what you need to do to maximize your knowledge of the situation, most effective. The second thing it does, is it tells you what type of problem you are solving. So if you have known knowns, you have all of the facts, you have the entire, what they call in legal world, universe of information. If you know what you don't know, that's a scientific problem. You use deductive methods to say, "Given the facts-

MBS ([09:07](#)):

Oh, yeah.

Jonathan ([09:37](#)):

... we have, what is the most likely thing to be true?"

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

Yup.

Jonathan ([09:40](#)):

If we don't know what we can know are unknown knowns.

MBS ([09:45](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan ([09:45](#)):

That's where this Bayesian reasoning, economic way of looking at the world, and by the way, how a lot of artificial intelligence works.



MBS ([09:55](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([09:55](#)):

It can help us figure out the answers to questions to which we don't have all of the information.

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

Yeah.

Jonathan ([10:03](#)):

Then, the last piece is what you and I were really trained in, which is abductive reasoning. If we have unknown unknowns, how do we imagine the future? Right?

MBS ([10:14](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan ([10:14](#)):

How do you have those Jules Verne visions of what could be?

MBS ([10:21](#)):

That's cool.

Jonathan ([10:22](#)):

Those visionary leaps. So if you just step back, and you make that list of knowns and unknowns, and I'm glad I'm not alone in thinking that this was actually a brilliant insight-

MBS ([10:31](#)):

No. This is really helpful.



Jonathan ([10:35](#)):

... then you can actually say, "Okay. I need my lawyer friend for this, or I need my artist friend for that."

MBS ([10:40](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([10:40](#)):

"I need my economist friend, my computer science, mathy, statistician friend, over here." Or, "I need my science friend for looking at known unknowns."

MBS ([10:54](#)):

So, I love how you've taken those four different styles of thinking, which felt fascinating, but pretty abstract. Then when you make it knowns and unknowns, it becomes more tangible and immediately measurable right away. Then, you've got something very interesting, which is like, "Not just what thinking do you bring to it, but how do you bring your community and your network to help you solve that?" What have you learned about growing a community?

Jonathan ([11:24](#)):

Hmm. First off, you're better at it than I am. We've met at a number of conferences. I've certainly walked by you in awe at a number of conferences. First thing is go to place-

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

This conversation's not dispelling that awe. It's like, "This one's the last one, again."

Jonathan ([11:51](#)):

The first thing is go to places with a lot of people you don't know, who know things that you don't.



MBS ([11:56](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([11:57](#)):

The second, keep your ears open. The third, always find out how you can be of service. This is a thing that's really grown, in my life, over the last number of years. I guess probably a mutual colleague, Adam Grant, really taught me this. When you actively try and be of the greatest service possible, as efficiently as you can, you create a change. You create an emotional shape in the world around-

MBS ([12:29](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([12:29](#)):

... you. He certainly has done that for me, with a couple of things that were really no skin off of his back, that changed my life. He blurbed my book, Rogue Waves.

MBS ([12:39](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([12:40](#)):

He helped me kind of have this breakthrough that it's not about me and how much I can do, and how much I can get. If I have that perspective in my life, it's limited to how much smarter and harder I work than everybody else. If I have the perspective of, "How many people can I love, how much help can I provide," my ability to attract change, help, service, resources, amazing things I could not have imagined, grows literally exponentially. It's a network effect.



MBS ([13:22](#)):

That's a great thing.

Jonathan ([13:23](#)):

So when I think about building my network, that's kind of what I think about, "Who can I be of service to? How can I be of service? What might they know that I don't? What question might they have that I haven't thought to ask?"

MBS ([13:39](#)):

I love it. Adam's helped me a couple of times, probably more than that. Two come to mind immediately, which is the coaching habit and the advice trap. I pinged him and said, "Do you know any good research folks who could help me out with some research on this?" He's like, "Sure," and just hooked me up with a couple of his students. They did some good work for me. You're right. I have a particular feeling about Adam, that I don't about other particular thought leaders, because there's been that exchange.

Jonathan ([14:08](#)):

And by the way, when you look at anybody who talks to Adam, it's a universal experience.

MBS ([14:16](#)):

Right.

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

He's done some really deep personal work. It's not a facade. It's not-

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

Yeah.



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

... a brand. He's done some really deep personal work to become that person and to stay in that space as much as possible.

MBS ([14:33](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([14:34](#)):

It's something I hope for myself. It's a shift-

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

Your hairstyle is trending towards Adam Grant's style, so.

Jonathan ([14:46](#)):

Yeah. I know. I still got a quarter inch-

MBS ([14:46](#)):

... for you. Yeah. Exactly.

Jonathan ([14:48](#)):

I still got a quarter inch of stubble, but-

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

You've got way too much hair for the Adam Grant look. Damn it. Jonathan, tell me about the book you've chosen to read for us.

Jonathan ([15:00](#)):

Yeah. I'm a geek. I read a lot, and I think about the study of knowledge a lot. I think about the future a lot. There's this fellow, Marshall McLuhan-



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

Yes.

Jonathan ([15:15](#)):

... who was a media theorist, who was profound in his understanding of the changing media landscape in the 1960s. This book was written in 1967.

MBS ([15:27](#)):

Oh, my goodness.

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

Yet, when the World Wide Web appeared, his book became really central to a lot of the early thinking about, "What would change? What would the impact be?" I think that as we move into the next world of artificial intelligence, personal intimate data from sensors, new digital currencies, I think the questions he's asking and the insights he was having about the world of digitization and electronic media-

MBS ([16:05](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([16:05](#)):

... are more important than they've ever been. I think they need to come back.

MBS ([16:10](#)):

That's so cool. I mean, I was born in 1967 and he's Canadian, so I've got a whole bunch of entwining with Marshall McLuhan, and I quote him regularly. I haven't read this book for a long time. It's very interesting to feel that it's only getting more pertinent, rather than less. How did you figure out what two pages to read?



Jonathan ([16:34](#)):

He coined the phrase the global village, which was a really important phrase in the early 1990s. I'm going to read the two pages where he coins this term because I think they're incredibly pertinent today. As we think about what happens next, they create a frame that stood the test of time. I think it will be a foundation again.

MBS ([17:00](#)):

Brilliant. I'm looking forward to it. Jonathan, over to you.

Jonathan ([17:07](#)):

"Time has ceased. Space has vanished. We now live in a global village, a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space. We've begun, again, to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us. We have had to shift our stress of attention from action to reaction. We must now know, in advance, the consequences of any policy, or action, since the results are experienced without delay. Because of electronic speed, we can no longer wait and see.

([17:42](#)):

George Washington once remarked, 'We haven't heard from Benjamin Franklin in Paris this year. We should write him a letter.'

([17:50](#)):

At the high speeds of electronic communication, purely visual means of apprehending the world are no longer possible. They're just too slow to be relevant, or effective. Unhappily, we confront this new situation with an enormous backlog of outdated mental and psychological responses. We have been left dangling.



[\(18:13\)](#):

Our most impressive words and thoughts betray us. They refer us only to the past, not to the present. Electronic circuitry profoundly involves men with one another. Information pours upon us instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced with still newer information.

[\(18:38\)](#):

Our electronically configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block by block, step-by-step, because instant communication ensures that all factors of the environment and of experience coexist in a state of active interplay. The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village. We have now become aware of the possibility of arranging the entire human environment as a work of art, as a teaching machine designed to maximize perception and to make everyday learning a process of discovery.

[\(19:22\)](#):

Application of this knowledge would be the equivalent of a thermostat controlling room temperature. It would seem only reasonable to extend such controls to all the sensory thresholds of our being. We have no reason to be grateful to those who juggle these thresholds in the name of haphazard innovation.

[\(19:43\)](#):

An astronomer looking through a 200-inch telescope exclaimed that it was going to rain. His assistant asked, 'How can you tell?' 'Because my corns hurt,' he said.

[\(19:57\)](#):

Environments are not passive wrappings, but are rather active processes which are invisible. The ground rules, pervasive structure, and overall patterns of environments allude easy perception. Anti-environments, or counter-situations



made by artists, provide means of direct attention and enable us to see and understand more clearly.

(20:19):

The interplay between the old and new environments creates many problems and confusions. The main obstacle is a clear understanding of the effects of the new media on our deeply embedded habit regarding all phenomena with a fixed point of view.

(20:36):

We speak, for instance, of gaining perspective. This psychological process derives unconsciously from print technology. Print technology created the public. Electronic technology creates the mass. The public consists of separate individuals walking around with separate fixed points of view. The new technology demands that we abandon the luxury of this posture, this fragmentary outlook. The method of our time is to use not a single, but multiple, models for exploration. The technique of suspended judgment is the discovery of the 20th century, as the technique of invention was the discovery of the 19th."

(21:23):

So, I hadn't really realized that it was going to be reading about epistemology. Right? Yeah. [inaudible 00:21:29].

MBS (21:29):

Because of the current-

Jonathan (21:32):

So, it kind of felt like really, really prescient that you asked those questions a few moments-

MBS (21:32):

I know.



Jonathan ([21:32](#)):

... ago.

MBS ([21:40](#)):

That was a great reading and partly I'm just struck by how dense that is. I felt I needed to hit a pause after every sentence just to go, "Wait. What was that? And, what do I need to understand about it?" I'm curious to know. What is at the heart of this for you?

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

I think he talks about several things that are important in our social media environment, where certain people are pushing and pulling those thresholds, the thermostat of our emotion. We need to be aware of that, that we need to step back and use all of our methods of knowing to say, "Is that true? And, what does that mean in the bigger picture?" We have better tools to see and understand information than ever before. We still need to remember to step back back and ask, "Do my corns hurt?" I think his point, that we are connected more than we have ever been in a community, in a society, in a global village, and yet, we feel more disconnected that at any point in my lifetime. I think we need to understand that, understand why that is and how we create love, how we create community, in this time where our perspective may be different, but our reality is the same.

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

One of the lines I jotted down when you're reading was this move from the luxury of being a public, where you are part of that public and you've got different points of view, to the creation of the mass, or the masses, I guess. There are different masses. I'm wondering, "How do I not become just part of the mass?" Because quite frankly, it's not that appealing an offer.



Jonathan ([23:43](#)):

Hmm. I think the true answer is that is the great question of our time, "How to stay engaged, and yet, be removed."

MBS ([23:56](#)):

Yeah. If you could just whip that out in three minutes as an answer, that would be great.

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

You might know this, being a coach who writes books. The second you write a book, you end up finding that you hang out exclusively with coaches. When you hang out exclusively with coaches, what many of them want to do is give you personality tests.

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

True.

Jonathan ([24:22](#)):

So, since I wrote my book last year, *Rogue Waves*, I've had more opportunities to do personality tests and assessments than you could possibly imagine. I think there's one, or two, of the major ones I haven't done, yet. One of the things that surprised me, in something called the Harrison assessment, was that I've always known I was a stress monkey. I get off on the energy of stress. There's a bunch of childhood reasons for that, and whatnot. I haven't noticed it in real time, and I haven't known what to do if I did.

([25:04](#)):

So, this is the piece of advice that a guy named Jim Povich gave to me. It's something you may know, and if you do meditation, you may know it. I've never gone seriously into that world. He said, "Hey, when you see yourself in that moment, when you feel the bubbles rising up, do this. Just [inaudible 00:25:23]



and close the back of your throat. Exhale. Close the back of your throat." That constricting forces you to go into that subconscious part of yourself to say, "What's going on?" What I've discovered is if I do that for 30 seconds, I am reset in almost any situation. It's changed my life. So, I don't have the grander answer of how to stay engaged and disengaged.

MBS ([25:57](#)):

Great answer, though.

Jonathan ([25:59](#)):

I know that piece to be true, for me.

MBS ([26:01](#)):

Yeah. There's a physiological truth to that. I'm reading a great book, at the moment, by Amanda Ripley called High Conflict. She defines high conflict as that conflict that gets ramped up, and seemingly deescalatable. I'm sure that's not-

Jonathan ([26:01](#)):

Right.

MBS ([26:21](#)):

... a word, but you know what I mean. So, she's-

Jonathan ([26:24](#)):

No.

MBS ([26:24](#)):

... interviewing in Colombia with the FARC guerrillas, and in the gang spaces in Chicago, and other places, as well.



Jonathan ([26:35](#)):

Yeah.

MBS ([26:36](#)):

Talking about de-escalation, one of the things she talks about, it's bigger than this because she's talking about systemic conflict. Breath is one of those things, just bringing mind to breathing. You just immediately calm your nervous system and can gain a perspective where you're a little bit out of the fight, or the stress, rather than in it.

Jonathan ([27:05](#)):

That's been true for me. When you think about that second piece, and I'm not an expert on conversation or conflict-

MBS ([27:14](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([27:14](#)):

... negotiation. We do have a mutual friend, Misha Glouberman, who is, though.

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

Yeah.

Jonathan ([27:22](#)):

One of the things he talks about, and the Harvard Negotiation Project talks a lot about this, too. I say this because we've done work together. I do innovation. I'm very uncomfortable in unknowns. A lot of people aren't. When you get to that point where there should be conflict, there was this really interesting thing, where we would pass through it and it wouldn't happen. It was the most-



MBS ([27:51](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([27:51](#)):

... bizarre experience. So, I actually ended up taking his class on conflict.

MBS ([28:01](#)):

How to talk to people in conflict. Yeah.

Jonathan ([28:04](#)):

How to talk to people. I ended up working with him because I wanted to understand, "What just happened?" Because it keeps happening, and I don't know how to do it. If I did, it would change my life.

MBS ([28:13](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([28:14](#)):

What I've come to realize is, there are kind of three conversations that we're having about any situation with another person. What happened? How do we feel about it? What happens next?

MBS ([28:30](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([28:31](#)):

When you start having two of those at the same time, or you start having them in the wrong order, nothing happens.

MBS ([28:38](#)):

Right, right.



Jonathan ([28:39](#)):

This is what Misha used to do. He'd say, "Okay. I know we're about to come to that point." If you've been a consultant for long enough, you know you're about to come to that point. He'd say, "Hey, here's how I'm feeling about this process. How are you feeling about it?"

MBS ([28:55](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([28:55](#)):

As a result, he separated what's happened from what happens next, from our emotions. We stepped into that emotional space and I was able to say, "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

MBS ([29:05](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([29:06](#)):

Then, he was able to come back and say, "Okay. So, I don't know that I fully understand your context. I've heard you. Here are some low-risk, high-value ways, just as a straw man, that I might be able to help remove-

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

Yeah.

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

... those blockers, those fears, those pains, those whatever." We would just go right past each other without stress.

MBS ([29:35](#)):

Right.



Jonathan ([29:35](#)):

It was the most amazing experience.

MBS ([29:35](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([29:39](#)):

So, as we move from being individuals, from needing to take others' perspectives, I think that's a really powerful way of thinking.

MBS ([29:50](#)):

Yeah. What strikes me in this conversation, Jonathan, is I'm drawn to two different levels to try and negotiate this societal force around an oval of information and a conglomeration into mass. One is this kind of individual relationship. I love when you're referencing back to Adam Grant, around, "Who do I love and how do I make a connection? How do I be of service?" So, there's that individual piece.

([30:21](#)):

In the reading, Marshall McLuhan talks about the power of pattern recognition and that ability to think more broadly and systemically around that.

Jonathan ([30:35](#)):

Right.

MBS ([30:36](#)):

I'm wondering, what do you know about system thinking, or pattern recognition? How might you develop that capacity to do that?

Jonathan ([30:51](#)):

Mm. That's a great question. A lot of what I do today, is help companies do that.



MBS ([31:00](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([31:01](#)):

It turns out that if you have a process for looking at new situations, for looking at the future, you can know a whole lot more than you imagine, is how I like to say it. It's my snarky way of saying it, but-

MBS ([31:14](#)):

It's a good marketing [inaudible 00:31:15].

Jonathan ([31:17](#)):

What I talk about in my book. Other people have said parts of this before. You need an awareness of what's happening. You need an awareness of what could change and what would happen if those things collided. We look individually at things like demographic shifts, artificial intelligence, inflationary pressure, new monetary regimes that are going to have to happen. We look at these things individually. What happens when they collide? What happens when you need automation because of the aging population? It's harder to grow because of these new monetary policies. As a business, how do you deal with those things colliding at the same time? What happens when you take a social trend, an economic trend, and a technological trend, and they collide? What does that mean for you?

([32:15](#)):

So, the first thing is really mapping those things out, and that's a lot of what I do purportedly as a futurist. The second is getting specific about what that means for you. The first piece is reality testing. It's what they call the Rogue method, so reality testing. We just talked about epistemology, knowns and unknowns, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. That's a lot of that first step saying, "Given the universe of what we know could be true, what do we actually know about that?" As the



world moves faster, as it gets more connected, the things that used to be true, the things that we know that used to be true, increasingly won't be true. So, how do you reality test? Then, how do you observe systems? A lot of times I like to create what I call a spaghetti diagram-

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

Yeah.

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

... where I say, "Okay. Here are the things we know are in this system. All these little nodes like black squares in space. Then, I like to draw, "How are they connected to each other?" Then, you can start to ask, "Okay. Well, if A goes to B, goes to C, if the ham bone goes to the knee bone, goes to the leg bone and you put-

MBS ([33:35](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([33:35](#)):

... whatever into the system, what comes out?" Or, if you move one of these pieces of the network somewhere else, what would happen next?"

MBS ([33:47](#)):

That's different. Yeah.

Jonathan ([33:48](#)):

Playing with that helps you understand the system. That helps you generate the range of plausible futures. Right? There's a lot of people-

MBS ([33:48](#)):

Mm-hmm.



Jonathan ([33:54](#)):

... out there who talk about science fiction futures, things that could never, well, science fantasy futures, things that could never happen. If you do kind of a straight line analysis, it looks like they could. Right?

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

Yeah.

Jonathan ([34:08](#)):

There's going to be some upper threshold, so. Solar power, for instance. People talk about solar power. It's going on this hockey stick. Right?

MBS ([34:16](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([34:17](#)):

The reality is solar power equipment is made of atoms, and the polymers are going to have core limits, and the aluminum is going to have core limits and they have to be installed. So, there are limits to how much that technology can actually grow, even if the technology itself is resolved. So, you've got to look at this from a systemic viewpoint.

MBS ([34:37](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([34:37](#)):

Then, what is that? What are those range of possible futures? Right? It stops. I'm wrong. Something happens in the middle. What does that mean for what you do? And what are the-



MBS ([34:37](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([34:46](#)):

... key steps you can take to uncouple your future from any downside? Often it's simple things, like in a contract, getting paid before you buy equipment. So, if you can do those things, you can radically shift the likelihood of a good outcome versus a bad-

MBS ([35:09](#)):

Yes.

Jonathan ([35:10](#)):

... outcome. And then, the last piece is experimentation. So-

MBS ([35:10](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([35:13](#)):

... you and I have been in the innovation business for quite some time. What I perpetually see is people want to innovate either against a bogeyman problem, "Oh, AI is going to destroy us," or they want to innovate against something that killed them in the past. Right? It's a business-

MBS ([35:13](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([35:31](#)):

... continuity problem. I look at innovations like investments. You want to make some high-risk, high-opportunity bets, like, "Let's put some money on Bitcoin. It



might be a thing." You want to make some medium risk, medium opportunity bets. "Let's buy a Fortune 500 index fund." Right?

MBS ([35:52](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([35:52](#)):

Then, you want to make some counter cyclical bets. So, you want to buy some insurance so that-

MBS ([35:52](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([35:57](#)):

... if the first two things are wrong, you still have a backup plan. You want to time these so that no matter what happens, you get the right payoffs on the right timeline. So, you should be treating your innovation investments like a pharmaceutical firm does, where they start off with a hundred molecules and they put them-

MBS ([36:16](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([36:17](#)):

... on a horse race. Even though they don't know what will succeed and what will fail, that's how they-

MBS ([36:17](#)):

Yeah.



Jonathan ([36:23](#)):

... get the reliable outcomes. So, that comes into five points, reality testing-

MBS ([36:29](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([36:29](#)):

... observing systems, generating futures, uncoupling threats and opportunities, and-

MBS ([36:34](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([36:34](#)):

... experimenting. Conveniently, that-

MBS ([36:37](#)):

Spells Rogue.

Jonathan ([36:38](#)):

The acronym is Rogue. Right. So, thus Rogue Waves, the book.

MBS ([36:41](#)):

Convenient, but not entirely accidentally.

Jonathan ([36:47](#)):

Hard work was done to get those words into an acronym.



MBS ([36:50](#)):

Totally. Yeah. I've created acronyms in my time. I know how you've been moving things around to make that happen. But perhaps, as a penultimate question-

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

Yeah.

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

Your book is called Rogue Waves. We know, in part, that's because of the acronym that you've created, there. What is it about a rogue wave that is a powerful metaphor?

Jonathan ([37:13](#)):

So in the deep ocean, 100-foot tall walls of water can pop up, literally, out of nowhere when individually manageable, waves collide. All of that energy focuses into one place in one time. So, I think that's a really great metaphor for what happens in the real world. Mathematically, the same sorts of models are applied to things like financial markets, and so on and so forth. They're called nonlinear Schrodinger equations, for the geeks among us. Not that I know how to do them. My point is that when you start realizing that you get these convergence points, these singularities-

MBS ([38:00](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([38:00](#)):

... and that those are the points when... Some companies create radical growth, and some companies don't survive. You start to shift the way you think about your business. The same thing in your life. Right? There are these moments,



there are these inflection points, that you don't know what they are, or why they are. You can probably ask a bunch of old folks what they hadn't expected that changed their lives. Maybe, you-

MBS ([38:00](#)):

Right.

Jonathan ([38:27](#)):

... have a kid by accident. Maybe, you have multiple sclerosis. Maybe, you're in a-

MBS ([38:27](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([38:33](#)):

... car accident. Maybe, you win the lottery. You know?

MBS ([38:33](#)):

Yeah.

Jonathan ([38:36](#)):

Who knows? But in those cases, the question you should be asking leading up to it is, "How do I increase my optionality and my potential, no matter what happens?"

([38:50](#)):

I think that's the key to innovation. It's being really clear about what the risks are that we're facing, not "What have we faced before," or "What is the venture capital hype cycle telling us we're going to be facing next?" Really getting clear about what those challenge points are for us, for our organization, for our lives and saying, "Okay. Well, what simple things can I do over time? Small changes can I make to radically increase my optionality and my potential moving forward?"



MBS ([39:23](#)):

Jonathan, it's been such a rich conversation. Thank you. My final question is this, What needs to be said that hasn't yet been said between the two of us?

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

I'm very analytical person, as you might've noticed. If the end of the day change isn't about the math, and it's not about the facts, it's about trust, it's about love, it's about the ability to have conversations that might be hard. What I've discovered in reading your books and being on this journey with all of these coaches is that when you take these two things and you put them together, the human process, the human journey, and the innovation process and the innovation journey, that's how we change the world. That's how we make a better place for all of us.

MBS ([40:30](#)):

Jonathan's got me thinking, "So, how well am I understanding risk? What do I need to do? And, who do I need to be, to increase my optionality and my potential?" Now, I don't have the answers to that, but it does remind me of something I was taught years ago about building reserves, financial reserves, sure, but also emotional, intellectual, health, and relational reserves, places where you've invested into so you have additional capacity, meaning a single moment. It might be you've invested in the capacity to take a breath before reacting. Or in the shorter term, it might be investing in finding the next thing to learn. For instance, I'm reading two great books at the moment, *Outlive* by Peter Attia and *Brain Energy* by Christopher Palmer. I'm learning how to be more resilient, healthier, in a more profound way in the last decade, or two, of my life. Perhaps in the biggest scheme of things, it might be committing to nurturing your friendship group so it's growing, rather than ossifying. Always, it's about this laying down of reserves, saving, investing, increasing optionality, and increasing my potential.



[\(41:52\)](#):

Now, if this interview struck a chord with you, can I suggest two others that you might enjoy? One is What Technology Promises by Azeem Azhar. That's Episode 56. He's got a kind of huge podcast and a huge newsletter about exponential and scale, which I subscribe to and I find very interesting.

[\(42:14\)](#):

Also, Pascal Finette. That's Episode 112, which weirdly enough, I've just noticed is exactly twice 56, which is what Azeem's episode is. Episode 112, Have We Cancelled Our Future? He is, I guess another futurist. He thinks about that stuff. So again, another really interesting conversation that you might enjoy picking up.

[\(42:34\)](#):

If you'd like more of Jonathan Brill, you can find his book, Rogue Waves, where you buy books, and his website is jonathanbrill.com. If you want to connect, his invitation is that you connect with him on LinkedIn.

[\(42:48\)](#):

Thank you so much for your support and encouragement of the podcast, for loving it, for rating it, for ranking it, for writing reviews of it, for passing episodes on, the ones that you liked, and going to your friends, "Hey, listen to this. You might enjoy it."

[\(43:03\)](#):

You're awesome, and you're doing great.