

# BOOKS AND IDEAS PODCAST

*With Ginger Campbell, MD*

## Episode #39

### Interview with Author and Creativity Coach, Eric Maisel, PhD

Aired December 22, 2010

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#### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Episode 39 of *Books and Ideas*<sup>1</sup>. I'm your host, Dr. Ginger Campbell. You can get complete show notes and episode transcripts at our website at [booksandideas.com](http://booksandideas.com). You can send me feedback via email at [docartemis@gmail.com](mailto:docartemis@gmail.com), or leave me voicemail at 205-202-0663.

Today's episode is an interview with [Dr. Eric Maisel](#), author of [\*Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions\*](#). Dr. Maisel is the author of numerous books, many of which are about the relationship between creativity and meaning. His new book challenges the common assumption that all obsessions are bad. In this interview we focus on the idea of productive obsession, and we also explore some ideas about how you can create more meaning in your life, no matter what your circumstances.

Before we get into the interview I want to thank everyone who took the time to vote for my other podcast, the [Brain Science Podcast](#), for the Best Science

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<sup>1</sup> For show notes go to: <http://www.virginiacampbellmd.com/blog/2010/12/22/eric-maisel-talks-about-productive-obsessions-books-and-idea.html>

Podcast in the recent [People's Choice Podcast Awards](#). Stay tuned for the announcements after the interview to find out who won.

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## INTERVIEW

**Dr. Campbell:** Eric, I want to thank you for taking the time to come on *Books and Ideas*. I'm really looking forward to talking to you about the relationship between creativity and meaning, but I thought maybe you would start out by just telling us a little bit about yourself. And I guess I didn't even give you a chance to say hi, either.

**Dr. Maisel:** Well, I'll start by saying hi. I'm an author. I've written 30 or so books. Actually I like to be clearer about that—I've written probably 50 books, 30 of which have been published—because as a creativity coach, which I am, I think it's important to remind creative and performing artists that a lot of the work we do won't be successful. So, I've had about 30 books of my 50 books published. I work as a creativity coach and as a meaning coach. I'm also a California licensed family therapist, but I don't work under the license any longer, I only do coaching.

**Dr. Campbell:** What does it mean to be a creativity coach, and how did you become one?

**Dr. Maisel:** Well, I'll start with the journey. I began as a novelist in my early 20's and did, perhaps, a dozen novels up until my early 30's. I had some published, had some lovely reviews, but was making no money. And we had small children at the time, so I retooled as a therapist. And as a therapist I was interested in working with creative and performing artists. I was curious, really,

about if there were many therapists working with creative and performing artists. And back then—this was before *The Artist's Way*, and many books that have become popular since then—it wasn't really much of a specialty. So, I decided to specialize in working with creative and performing artists. Their issues were my issues, and they interested me.

And then a point came where I wasn't that interested in working in the medical model of therapy. I didn't believe I was diagnosing and treating mental disorders. I thought I was working with the normal problems of living that creative and performing artists manifest. And so, I segued over time—perhaps about 20 years ago now—from therapy to coaching, and I specialized in my coaching working with self-identified creative and performing artists. And I say it that way to distinguish it from maybe the everyday creative person who wants to be more creative in the way she makes her soup or knits something. These are people who are trying to make it; to have careers as creative and performing artists—which adds a whole extra set of challenges to the mix.

**Dr. Campbell:** Right. So, as you mentioned before, you are a prolific author. Have you written any more fiction recently, or are you continuing to focus on nonfiction?

**Dr. Maisel:** I focus on nonfiction, but I actually just finished a mystery novel—which my literary agent is actually reading this week, to see if she likes it and wants to represent it. I have high hopes for it, but we shall see. One of the subjects we may touch on—the subject of productive obsessions—that mystery was my productive obsession for many months. I spent a lot of time in my mind in the underworld of Berlin, and quite enjoyed being there. And now I've come out into the sunlight from those months, and I'm doing other work now.

**Dr. Campbell:** Well, I did want to spend some time talking about your latest book—giving you a chance to talk about it, I guess I should say—which is

*Brainstorm: Harnessing the Power of Productive Obsessions.* Do you want to give us a brief —

**Dr. Maisel:** Sure. I think the starting point there is with the very word, ‘obsession,’ which got sort of hijacked more than a hundred years ago by the clinical world and got defined as anything that was unwanted and intrusive. As soon as you define an obsession as an unwanted intrusive thought, you’ve made it negative by definition. And I don’t believe that all obsessions are negative. I think our smartest people, our best and our brightest, for thousands of years have been well aware that biting into something, really getting engrossed in something, spending days, months, weeks, years on that something is a positive thing—or can be a positive thing.

So, the first point of the book was to return the word ‘obsession’ to the positive side of the ledger, and to remind people that while, of course, there are negative and unproductive obsessions, there are also productive and positive obsessions, and those are worth nurturing.

**Dr. Campbell:** What’s the key difference between a productive obsession and one that is pathologic?

**Dr. Maisel:** I think the key difference is its source. Unproductive obsessions, or clinical obsessions, arise from anxiety, typically. They’re the way we vigilantly over-worry things. Whereas, our productive obsessions we arrive at more mindfully, and they represent our meaning-making needs. They’re the ways we make meaning. And so, the sources are radically different.

To put it one way, it’s the difference between worrying about being overweight and obsessively working your exercise regimen. The first is kind of a pure negative—to just be worrying and worrying and worrying, and obsessing about something without actually making a change. No one thinks that’s a very good

thing. But to spend lots of your neuronal capital on creating the exercise regimen that works for you; that's a good thing. So, it's the difference between anxiety driving something and meaning driving something.

**Dr. Campbell:** And then, conscious choice is obviously a big element of that.

**Dr. Maisel:** That's right. Obviously, many productive obsessions will arise unconsciously. You know, a theme for a novel may not be a conscious choice; it may arise somewhere in us. So, the distinction isn't quite so much between mindfulness and a lack of mindfulness. Although, we do argue in the book and suggest in the book that you can choose your productive obsessions; and doing that is a very sensible and powerful thing to do, especially if you're not used to having productive obsessions. If this idea is new to you, then you may have to consciously choose one, give it a shot, see if it actually was something that was genuinely of interest to you. Give it some time, and if it happens to be of genuine interest to you, it's going to become a very big part of your successful life.

**Dr. Campbell:** Now, I know you're not a neuroscientist, but do you have any ideas about what might be going on in our brain when we do have a productive obsession?

**Dr. Maisel:** I think most of the ways we talk about the brain are metaphoric. And there are more or less interesting metaphors for the brain. The one that I like, and the one that we adopt in the book is the neuronal gestalt model of brain functioning, which is a fancy way of saying that in order to have a thought, neurons have to gather; and that the more neurons gather, the, so to speak, 'larger' the thought; and the longer they stay together, the more sustained the thought. And, as I say, this is a metaphor. This is not meant to be an analysis of the way the brain actually works—although, who knows, it might be.

But to pursue this metaphor, the more we have small thoughts all day long (and small thoughts are natural—‘I have to pick up the kids at 3:00,’ or, ‘the lawn needs mowing,’ or anything we can think of; not just negative thoughts, but just any small thought), the more neurons we’ve stolen from our neuronal capital and the less ability we have to have a big thought. I think that’s the way people experience life: as a series of small thoughts. And they hunger for, and wish for some larger thoughts, and they can’t really have those larger thoughts until they do a decent job of quieting their mind and not having so many small thoughts all the time.

**Dr. Campbell:** And that seems to be getting harder and harder in today’s world.

**Dr. Maisel:** It does. It seems to be getting progressively harder. It’s interesting, if you look at the writings of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde painters who were so interested in African art and primitive art, they already, 120 years ago, were feeling that life was made up of too many small thoughts, and that the ‘primitive’ artists, so to speak, could create abstractions that were so powerful because they had fewer things to think about. They maybe, of course, tremendously worried about the tiger in their campsite, but overall they didn’t have a million small things to worry about, and they could grasp bigger ‘gestures,’ so to speak. And this was 120 years ago that this worry about us being too busy with small thoughts was already being articulated. Now it’s exponentially worse.

**Dr. Campbell:** It’s so easy to get distracted—even you can get distracted with playing with tools that are supposed to keep you from being distracted.

**Dr. Maisel:** Absolutely. One of the things I try to teach clients is that distraction is, in large measure, a naming game. If you don’t name a thing as a distraction, it won’t be one. If your cat walking by distracts you, that probably means you weren’t really wanting to work on your novel right at this moment,

because it's not really a gigantic distraction. So, we need to be more mindful of the way we name things. This is just an element of good cognitive self-therapy—to not name a thing a distraction unless it really is distracting us.

**Dr. Campbell:** That's a good point. There is a quote I want to read from your book, because I think that it might lead us in an interesting direction. It's from Page 27, where you say, "Productive obsession is a way of using your mind that you can apply equally to the ordinary challenges of life and to extraordinary ideas that bubble up." Would you like to expound on that idea a little bit for me?

**Dr. Maisel:** Sure. People often think of the idea of productive obsession in connection with the work that artists and scientists do—you know, a Beethoven obsessing a symphony into existence, or Einstein obsessing theories of relativity into existence. And that's all true, and that's certainly an important side of obsessing. But we can also use the same phenomenon of using more of our neuronal capital intensely just on everyday matters.

For instance, let's say that you're in that sandwich generation and your dad is declining, and you're beginning to wonder about does he need this kind of care or does he need to be put into this kind of place. Because those considerations provoke anxiety, we're likely to make some impulsive action, because that's what we do when we get anxious; we sort of impulsively do things to get rid of the experience of anxiety.

Rather than act impulsively, you can turn that worry into a productive obsession by actually turning your mind over to the question of what would be the best place for dad, or what's the best thing to do for dad, and to spend time maybe every morning making the kinds of phone calls and sending out the kinds of emails that amount to real effort to investigate something. So, something as, so to speak, 'ordinary' as handling a personal problem can be handled as if it were a productive obsession. And the simple way to say that is we can pay more

attention and better attention to the things that concern us if we really devote ourselves to understanding them.

**Dr. Campbell:** I have been curious about the relationship between this theme in your new book about productive obsession and many of your other books which are more aimed at creativity. And I thought there was a big overlap there. It sounds like a ‘productive obsession’ is a more inclusive term in some ways. Would that be accurate?

**Dr. Maisel:** Absolutely. It’s even fair to elevate, let’s say, hobbies to this place. It’s really about making meaning, and not about creating. If in your life it is meaningful to you to, let’s say, spend a lot of time in cemeteries enjoying thinking about 200 years ago or 300 years ago, and you turn that into a productive obsession, that’s entirely plausible and sensible, as long as that increases the meaning quotient of your life. You’re right; this is not about another technique to use in the service of creating—although it can be that—but rather, a technique to use to make and maintain meaning in your life in all sorts of ways.

**Dr. Campbell:** Along those lines, I want to come back to the meaning thing in a few minutes, but there were a couple of key ideas I wanted to make sure we didn’t miss that stood out for me. One was the fact that you made a point of saying that choosing a productive obsession is not just like a one-time deal—like you pick one and that’s it for your whole life.

**Dr. Maisel:** No, that’s right; productive obsessions are serial affairs—they come one after another. Because, let’s say that your current productive obsession is a novel you’re working on; obviously, at some point you finish it. And not only do you finish it, but you have to detach from it once it’s finished. You have to send it out into the world; not still be vigilant about it. That would amount to an unproductive obsession, to be still somehow carrying that novel once it’s done.

So, a productive obsession is associated with a given problem to solve or project to complete, and then you move on to the next one. And often there is a period between these productive obsessions of a little bit of meaninglessness, where we know we're not biting into something right now; we're not on to anything. We can frame it as a kind of vacation from meaning. But we're already beginning to look for the next thing that's going to engross us. And so, yes, productive obsessions amount to a serial sort of thing, where we create and nurture and maintain one after another for as long as we live.

**Dr. Campbell:** And another key idea, I thought, was the fact that you point out that productive obsession is hard work.

**Dr. Maisel:** Absolutely. Because the initial seed that produces this obsession is no work at all, it just bubbles up. But then you're stuck with the work of elaborating the idea. To take one example, Joan Didion remarked that her novel, *Play It as It Lays*, arose because she saw a woman in a white dress crossing a Las Vegas casino floor. So, she had this image, but she had no idea what the novel was about. That image was easy. It bubbled up out of the unconscious, provoked something in her, made her want to start on some large adventure.

But then—to quote Virginia Woolf, ‘resignation sets in’—then we're stuck with the thing we just inaugurated, and that's almost always hard work. And it's hard work with no guarantees. It's hard work of the following sort. You might now devote yourself to writing this novel, and spend two years writing it, and end up with something that didn't work. And nobody likes to contemplate that. Intellectually we understand that things may not work, but viscerally we hate that idea.

So, yes, it's hard work on a number of levels. And yet, it's still important work, because if we don't do that sort of work, we don't make ourselves proud; we don't feel like we're manifesting our potential. And so, in one sense we may have it

easier to never tackle this hard work, but in another sense we typically get depressed and understand that we're not really manifesting ourselves.

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As *Books and Ideas* completes its fourth year I want to thank [audible.com](https://www.audible.com) for their ongoing support. Since Audible started sponsoring me about three years ago their library of available books has more than doubled to over 75,000 titles. If you aren't a current member you can get a free audiobook download by going to [audiblepodcast.com/booksandideas](https://audiblepodcast.com/booksandideas). They have titles in every genre, including many books that have been covered on this podcast. One book I think you might find particularly thought-provoking is the new book by Sam Harris, [\*The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values\*](#).

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**Dr. Campbell:** Eric, perhaps you might talk just a little bit along these lines about some of the other myths a person might have. I mean the idea that something like this should just come to us, and be easy, and that sort of stuff. Are there other sorts of myths that we really might need to debunk along these lines?

**Dr. Maisel:** Well, I'm sure there are many of them. I don't know what exactly is going to pop into my mind, except the following does: one sort of myth is that we are transparent to ourselves—that we know what we're doing. And that's certainly a myth, because we're very tricky creatures. To use old-fashioned Freudian language, we're very defensive. We don't really want to quite know what's going on with our own thoughts and with our own actions.

I think one of the clearest proofs of that is the way we make use of two ideas nowadays to keep ourselves from doing our work. Those ideas are the ideas that 'I'm too tired,' and, 'I'm too busy.' And because those two ideas have so many grains of truth in them—because we do get tired nowadays, and we are very busy

nowadays—because they ring true, we get to say them to ourselves and then let ourselves off the hook and not force ourselves to do our important work. So, I think that piece of that puzzle—that piece of mythology, that we actually understand what’s going on inside of us—needs a lot of debunking.

And we need to be much better cognitive investigators of what we’re actually thinking—what our agenda is with what we’re thinking. And then we want to do the sorts of things that cognitive therapists teach. They teach a very simple, smart, three-step process for dealing with the thing I’ve just been describing. And that is that you notice what you’re saying to yourself (which is already an act of courage—if you’ve been trying to fool yourself, then demanding of yourself that you notice is an act of courage) and then, disputing those utterances that don’t serve you.

Instead of saying, ‘I’m too tired,’ you would say, ‘I am tired, but I’m not too tired to spend 20 minutes on my home business,’ or, ‘I’m not too tired to spend half an hour on my novel.’ And then the third step is to substitute more affirmative language and to kind of buoy our own spirits. That three-step process of noticing, and disputing, and substituting can go a long way to aligning our thoughts with our intentions.

**Dr. Campbell:** That gets us going in that direction. The other thing was in your book you have some advice on choosing a productive obsession. I mean once you’ve convinced us, I think pretty well, that this is a good thing to do with our brains, then we go, ‘OK, what next?’ And I was very struck by the fact that in the chapter in your book about choosing, you said some things that I think also are the opposite from what we assume. And one of the ones that really stuck out for me was that you have to choose something that genuinely interests you, not something you think you should be passionate about.

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes. It's a complicated matter. Let me start maybe one step back from there, and that is that most people don't actually know what they love. I think we knew pretty clearly as kids that we loved going to the movies, or we loved playing ball, or we loved this, that, and the other thing. We had simple, pure loves as kids. And then, as we fend for our survival over the decades and life becomes more complex, as adults we have a lot of likes—we may like a certain restaurant or like a certain TV show—but I think we really lose track of and touch with what we love.

It's not so easy to choose a productive obsession if you don't know what you love. So, I think one of the first steps is actually to try to just generate a list of the things that you think interest you, to see if there's something on that list that maybe amounts to a current love. And all you can do is hazard a guess. You can't really know beforehand, until you engage with that thing, if you really do love it. But the first step is to get some sort of accounting going of the things that may interest you.

And then you want to see, by launching into the activities that we described about how to keep a productive obsession going, you want to, by doing all of that, see if this thing that you thought was a genuine interest really rises from mere interest to passionate interest. Most things we embark upon nowadays are mere interests, as opposed to passionate interests; and it takes a lot of time—not necessarily years, but certainly days, weeks, and months—to see if a thing that we believe is a mere interest really wants to rise to the level of passionate interest.

**Dr. Campbell:** Then this almost seems like a contradiction now: in the example you gave of the person who's going to be solving the problem of how to take care of their aging parent, this would be an example of something that wouldn't necessarily be something we would like, per se, but might still be very important for us to pursue.

**Dr. Maisel:** Absolutely.

**Dr. Campbell:** So, how do you fit that into the —

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes. It's not a contradiction, because both are subsumed under the idea of making meaning. It may be the case that the way you make meaning today is to pursue something you love, or it may be the case that the way you make meaning today is to pursue something that is a responsibility of yours or that you see as a duty. So, the same process can be used for things that are loves and things that are duties; and both of those categories of things are things that we hold as meaningful.

**Dr. Campbell:** Should we shift our conversation toward meaning, or do you have more that you would like to say about the theme of productive obsessions—because I do want to have some time to talk about meaning.

**Dr. Maisel:** I'm happy to shift.

**Dr. Campbell:** Would you like to just maybe start us off?

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes, sure, I'll launch a little bit here. One of the ideas that I'm writing about a lot and trying to stand behind is the idea of the, what I think is necessary, paradigm shift from seeking meaning to making meaning. I think we have held as a metaphor for thousands of years the idea of seeking meaning: that meaning is out there somewhere on the top of a hill, or in a book, or in a religion, or some place; that meaning is out there, and if we can't locate it, it's lost; and if we can't locate it, we don't have it; and that life is some kind of project of looking for that meaning and, if we can't find it, standing at a loss.

And I think it's the wrong metaphor. I think that we've come far enough as a species to understand how we want to represent ourselves in life—what our values are, what our principles are—and rather than looking for meaning or

seeking meaning, it's time to make meaning. That is, it's time to make decisions on a daily basis about where we want to invest ourselves, and how we want to spend our time, and how we want to represent ourselves, and to take a more active, and proactive, and instrumental look at living.

**Dr. Campbell:** Absolutely. Like I said, I've read several of your books. Actually, the way I discovered your work was by reading, [\*The Atheist's Way: Living Well Without Gods\*](#); and, obviously, that's a very important theme in that book. And it really struck me (and I'm going to just paraphrase a theme I think you say over and over again in all your books) that meaning is not something we find, it's something we create. That's exactly what you just said, but I wanted to just repeat it, because I think it's so important. That really does challenge a lot of assumptions that people—both believers and non-believers—have about where meaning comes from.

**Dr. Maisel:** It does. And for some people it's a joy to hear that, because they recognize, sort of instantly, that they've been chasing something that they can stop chasing.

**Dr. Campbell:** That's the way I felt when I read it. Yes. I spent a large section of my life doing the searching for meaning thing, and early in my adulthood I was very struck by the writings of Viktor Frankl, and his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. I've been on that search thing, and I'm happy with the idea of stopping searching.

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes.

**Dr. Campbell:** But also, as it relates to the example we just had a minute ago, this means that if we are in a situation where the thing we need to give our focus to is not necessarily something we would have wanted in our life, by saying that

we are going to create meaning from that, we're basically giving ourselves the power to create meaning out of any life situation.

**Dr. Maisel:** That's right. And it's a powerful reframe for the things that bore us, or that trouble us, or that feel hard to do. Let's say that you're wanting to write a novel—to go back to that example. On any given day the work may not be going well. That's one of the dirty little secrets of the creative process—that some percentage of the time you don't like what you're doing, it's not going well, or what have you.

When you realize that this is the process of making meaning—that sitting there serves the book, even if it's a bad day, even if you turn out 20 words you hate and have to destroy—even if nothing, so to speak, 'productive' comes from that day, if you recognize that this is supporting your intention to make meaning by writing a novel, then you can congratulate yourself at the end of that day and say, 'I made meaning today,' as opposed to doing what most people will do: 'I wasted this day.' Most people will say at the end of that day, 'I wasted this day,' because they don't recognize that they have actually been actively in the service of their meaning-making needs.

**Dr. Campbell:** And you mentioned earlier the book, *The Artist's Way*, which, in my day, I have read, and done many, many, many morning pages. And actually, that was an activity that I found useful, but ...

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes. I have to stop people from doing their morning pages.

**Dr. Campbell:** Because once you've done that, it's like you've blown your wad. If you actually have a project you want to do, you can't do morning pages. It's like what you said about the neuronal investment; it's like they all went there, and there's nothing left.

**Dr. Maisel:** That's exactly right.

**Dr. Campbell:** But when I was reading *The Atheist's Way*, what I was struck by was here's somebody who is helping many creative professionals and is not using this model of the mystical muse. You know, a lot of writers think that things are coming from some sort of supernatural place. And they do the work—they say, 'I've got to sit in the chair every day so it will come to me'—but they still sort of have this magical thinking approach to it. And it's good to get away from the magical thinking.

**Dr. Maisel:** Absolutely. And just to piggyback a little on what you were saying, I really do have to sell people on the idea of stopping the morning pages, or making them become evening pages; and also moving everything else that so many people do nowadays in that beginning of the day—whether it's Yoga, or exercise, or journaling, or whatever it is—to move it to a different time in the day. Because if you intend, as my clients intend, to get some important creative work done, the morning is the best time to do it—by far.

And there are three reasons for that. That's not just an arbitrary idea; there are reasons for that. The first is the obvious one that if you were to work on something every morning you'd get a lot done over time. That's the obvious one. The second idea is that if you turn to your creative work first thing each morning, you get to make use of your sleep thinking—because we think at night. We dream at night, but we also think at night. We dream in REM sleep and we think in non-REM sleep. And we do powerful thinking, but that thinking dissipates as soon as we turn to the day. As soon as we make that first decision about should I have a bagel or bran flakes, we've already lost whatever sleep thinking accrued during the night. But if you were to turn to your novel, or your painting, or whatever it is you're working on, first thing, then you have all of that good thinking available to you. So, that's an important reason to turn to your work first thing.

And then the third reason piggybacks on what we've been talking about a moment ago, and that is if you turn to your work first thing, you have the

experience of having made some meaning on that day already, and the rest of the day can be half meaningless and you won't get depressed. It's as if you had built up some meaning capital on that day—kind of meaning reservoir—and the rest of the day, even if it's filled with boring things, will not disturb you, because you know A) that you've made meaning on that day, and B) that you get to make meaning in just a few hours tomorrow morning. So, those are some of the reasons why I try to sell all of my clients on the idea of instituting a morning creativity practice of the sort I was just describing.

**Dr. Campbell:** Well, I can say from my own experience that I know that is true. Although, I have to admit that it was over 10 years ago that I actually wrote a book—that was never published. But the way I wrote it was doing exactly that.

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes. That's the way we get things done. And just let me say as a big parenthesis, the proof is always in the pudding. If someone says to me, 'Well, I work much better in the evening,' I'll say, 'Great.' Really these ideas are only important if you're struggling and need to make a change, and would like to do something that maybe is better than what you're currently doing. But, obviously, there is nothing magical about working in the morning vs. working in the evening.

People can work whenever they want to work. But the proof is in the pudding, and most creative and performing artists don't get as much done as they would like to. And when they come to me with that issue—that they're not getting enough done—then I want to sell them on this, because I know it will help them get more done.

**Dr. Campbell:** I'm an emergency room doctor. I tell people to use ice, and then occasionally I have somebody with chronic pain that says, 'Well, heat works for me.' Well, I'm not going to tell them, 'Well, then ...'

**Dr. Maisel:** Exactly.

**Dr. Campbell:** But that doesn't change the fact that, for most people, ice is going to be better.

**Dr. Maisel:** That's right. For most people a morning creativity practice is the way to go.

**Dr. Campbell:** Eric, I've really enjoyed talking with you today. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we close?

**Dr. Maisel:** I think I would just like to maybe elaborate for a moment on the way to get a productive obsession going. We touched on some pieces, but I think I'd like to say it as maybe a little three-step process. And the first is to quiet your mind. I think that's so important for almost any of our enterprises, but here it's doubly important. So, the first step is to get your mind a little quieter. And then the second step is to try to notice where your interests lie, and choose one as your productive obsession. And then the third step is to make real time and space for it; to really pencil on to your schedule your productive obsession for that, maybe, first hour of the morning, and have a quiet place where you can actually deal with your thoughts. Those three simple steps of quieting the mind, and noticing what interests you, and making time and space for what interests you can actually make a profound change in your life.

**Dr. Campbell:** That sounds like a good place to start. And I also recommend your book, [Brainstorm](#). Is there any place where my listeners can go to learn more about your work?

**Dr. Maisel:** Yes, there's a site for me, and that's [ericmaisel.com](#). And that's a place to learn about all the workshops I give and the trainings I give. And then there is a site specifically for the book, *Brainstorm*, and that's

[brainstormthebook.com](http://brainstormthebook.com). And if anybody wants to drop me an email and chat about anything, my email address is [ericmaisel@hotmail.com](mailto:ericmaisel@hotmail.com).

**Dr. Campbell:** Thanks, Eric. I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with us today.

**Dr. Maisel:** It's been great talking to you. Thanks a lot.

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First I want to thank Dr. Eric Maisel for coming on *Books and Ideas*. The key idea I hope that you will remember from this interview is the idea of shifting from seeking meaning to making meaning.

Now for a few announcements before I close. First I want to mention that the *Books and Ideas* application which has been available for the [iPhone](#) for most of this year is now available for [Android](#). The best thing that you get from this app is the ability to stream podcasts without downloading them, and also you can get episode transcripts right on your device.

Next I want to mention that I have moved the website from *Books and Ideas*, and it's now being hosted by Squarespace. You can still get there by going to [booksandideas.com](http://booksandideas.com), but you want to make sure to update your bookmarks. I have moved all my websites, including [sciencepodcasters.org](http://sciencepodcasters.org), so the only thing that should start with 'docartemis.com' is the [Brain Science Podcast Discussion Forum](#), which I have not moved yet. If you want to share my work with others, I suggest you use the address, [virginiacampbellmd.com](http://virginiacampbellmd.com), because it has the show notes for both *Books and Ideas* and the *Brain Science Podcast*.

I think I mentioned earlier that this represents the fourth anniversary of *Books and Ideas*, so I do want to take a moment to talk about the future. To be honest, I'm not sure how many shows I will produce in 2011. I do intend to put the *Brain*

*Science Podcast* out every other month, and leave the alternate months open for *Books and Ideas*. I will be on the lookout for great books and interesting guests, but I am shifting my focus to other projects. I still haven't decided if I want to write a book about podcasting aimed at scientists and physicians.

If you want to keep up with when new episodes come out—which I know is hard to do when you have a show that's not coming out on a regular schedule—I suggest that you go to the website at [booksandideas.com](http://booksandideas.com) and subscribe to my [newsletter](#), which will allow you to get show notes automatically, and you won't miss any episodes.

Now, I guess I can't put it off any longer. The *Brain Science Podcast*, as some of you probably already know, did not win the Best Science Podcast in the People's Choice Podcast Awards. The winner was *The Skeptics' Guide to the Universe*, which is hosted by Dr. Steven Novella. Dr. Novella was interviewed on the show back in [Episode 16](#). If you haven't heard that episode, maybe you'd like to go back and listen to it.

Before I close I want to remind you that *Books and Ideas* does have its own [Facebook Fan page](#), and I hope you will visit the new website. You can send me feedback as always, at [docartemis@gmail.com](mailto:docartemis@gmail.com), or leave me a voicemail at 205-202-0663.

Thanks again for listening. I hope to talk with you again very soon.

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[music]

Theme music for *Books and Ideas* is “The Open Door” by Beatnik Turtle. Be sure to visit their website at [beatnikturtle.com](http://beatnikturtle.com).

[music]

Transcribed by [Lori Wolfson](#)  
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