



The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. To its right are contact details: a WhatsApp icon with the number '+91 85914 52129*', a Twitter icon with the handle '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with the website 'playtopotential.com'. Further right, under the heading 'Also available on:', are icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. On the right side of the banner is a portrait of the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with a red name tag below it that reads 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman'. At the bottom left of the banner, a small note states: '*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

Context to the conversation

Neeraj speaks about how he has tuned into the vital few things that energize him (good conversations with good people, kids, sport, Plaksha). He speaks about how he has been intentional in architecting this portfolio.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Neeraj, I wanted to move to a different theme from let's say just the work thing to the... if I may zoom out a little bit. One of the things that strikes me about you is how you manage your energy. I think one of things that comes up in my coaching with leaders is often just energy management. How do you do things in a way that conserves your energy so that... you take care of not just the P&L but also your balance sheet so that you can play the long game. Given your remit, Neeraj, and I go back even 25 years, 27 years back in campus, we would have a demanding schedule in IIMA but I would see you play Frisbee every evening and sort of be, you know, you would always, there was a certain, if I may say, disciplined balance and again, Venkatesh used the same term. So talk to us a little bit about just... how your typical day looks like, specifically given you travel quite a bit, also run half marathons as a certain fitness you keep. Talk to us about how you manage your energy.

Neeraj Aggarwal (NA): So, I have no typical day. I probably have a typical month at best. Because my job needs... One of joys of the job is there's so much variety. And every week feels a bit different. But in a month or a quarter, may have a rhythm to it. So, sorry for not answering. But I think I've over the period found out things which give me energy.

So I think great interactions firstly give me energy. I think that's so my I'm in a right profession in that sense because I tend to have very often great so learning from people who have I get to meet people across a wide band of both within BCG but also beyond BCG. Yes. And I always feel that's one of the most joyful parts of my job. So that itself gives me energy. Right. So finding a job which gives you energy is helpful and my job does not drain energy. It gives me energy. I think my kids give me energy because when they are small to they are so challenging. They make you humble. They make you grounded. they, you know, I think Khalil Gibran's poem that your kid, your children are not your children. Their life longing for itself and you know, they come from you, they don't belong to you. I deeply believe in that and I think they'll let you appreciate how unique they are and how different they are and how little you know about. So, I think as well. And I think sports has always given me energy. So, I've always tried to play or embrace kind of physical activity and it has moved on from

half marathon now my recent passion is to get good at badminton. I play a lot with my son he's much better than me than I am on sport now he's 15 but or gym, gym has been an active part of my life so things I can do in like contained I And I think having purpose. So, Plaksha which has also been something, it means more time, but it has been very rewarding. actually, I think doing more things, but enjoying being in the moment and enjoying them in the moment has given me energy.

DJ: You make it look very simple, Neeraj. But back to one of the things you said, you said BCG gives me energy, but I'm sure you've sort of made, even within BCG, you've probably made a set of micro choices to align the kinds of things you do towards what gives you energy. So can you talk a little bit about some of the choices you might have made to sort of ensure that you're in the zone of energy generation rather than depletion?

NA: So I think I've always felt life is too short to work with clients you don't like so I work with clients I like As opposed to I don't like right I mean, you know, so I think there are many I like but there's some I didn't and I would then not you know So I think you know, so that is you can make that choice Equally people you choose when you're choosing to work with actually but as I've matured I've actually appreciated to work with people who are very dissimilar to me also because they let you see your own blind spots. So actually, you know, in the past, I needed to be right more often. But I've learned to, I don't know if I've learned to say less, I try to say less, but I certainly learned to observe more and appreciate duality, you know, whatever you want to call it, of perspectives. And I think being in more recently in our exec committee, which is 11 different nationalities of 14 people has allowed me to see how the same problem can be examined by so many different lenses and it's been genuinely a joy. You know how a Scandinavian will look very differently to an American, to an Italian, an Australian, to a Korean, you know just that has been an exercise of great learning.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What I find striking in Neeraj's approach is the fact that it is holistic. It has health, it has purpose, it has family, it has work and it has play! It is wonderful that he is intentional about life in a holistic sense despite such a demanding job that he holds. This is the theme I address in the book – Play to Potential – Lead a full life, become the best you, published by Penguin. I outline an approach – leading a FLAVOUR-ful life. F is for tuning into family context, L is making space for what you love, A is to be focused on a well-rounded aspiration than a unidimensional ambition, VO is about how we add value and find the right opportunity, U is investing in yourself and R is Relationships. Neeraj is such a wonderful poster-child for this approach to life.

On the sidelines of this podcast conversation, I had the opportunity to chat with Neeraj briefly about the book.

DJ: *“Neeraj, you were kind enough to share a few words of advance praise on the book, Play to Potential. I'm curious to understand what stayed with you when you read the book. You want to share a sort of maybe share a couple of things that that stayed with you when you read the book.”*

Neeraj: *“So I think firstly the framework FLAVOUR connected with me. I told you this the very first time you told me. Thank you. And particularly I think the VO part of it to me had a, in every framework has something which instinctively appeals to you. I, for example, in BCG values, there's this one value we have expand out of the possible that deeply connects with me as a person. So this*

video had this magic about it, which I think just deeply, deeply connected with me. Of course I, you know, don't get me wrong. I love every aspect.

The F and the R, the family, the relationship, everything. So I think there was something there you unearthed was magical. And I think how you also did not try to... I think you brought it to brass tacks on by taking people from various facets of life. There's a certain playbook of leadership. You kind of brought it to the examples you took of whether Sumeet or Soma or other people who I know very well and I deeply admire and respect. And I think connecting it to that made the framework more both endearing and something to aspire to. So it connected in a very deep fashion. Otherwise, many of the books, they have such untouchable people as examples. I think not that these are not untouchable, they are also, but I think they just feel like they live in a different world and they don't connect with my world kind of stories.

One of the I should mention is when we had dinner, Priyanka and you and me, one of the metaphors you used was metaphor of a lotus. As an Asian way of looking at leadership and interestingly enough when I spoke to Shoma about when I asked her the question about what do you think plater potential means, she said life should be like a lotus. You should unfurl like a lotus because just three things come out and the other petals don't, it's not a good sight.

So I have a, you know, since you raised the Lotus point, I think a Lotus is rooted. It is, but at the same time, it's reaching for light. So back to my point about, and it has interconnectedness below the water. So that is so wonderful about Lotus. And I think that is what is needed in everybody's life also."

DJ: I guess we all need to find a version of FLAVOUR that works for us in the context of our life. You can find the Kindle, Audible or the print version at Amazon or any of the popular book stores.

End of transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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