



## Context to the conversation

Neeraj speaks about how he approaches life in decades and that sometimes we overestimate what we can get done in a day but underestimate what we can get done in a decade. He speaks about the values he would love to inculcate to his children and provides his perspective on playing to potential.

## Transcription

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Deepak

Neeraj, we could keep going. I'm mindful of time. So why don't I shoot some quick questions to you as we move towards wrapping up this conversation. One is just clearly you've sort of been very intentional about personal growth. What's been your... If you had to sort of distill your approach to personal growth and self-development, what would you say?

Neeraj

I think I look at life in, you know, 10-year phases in some sense. I feel a lot gets done in 10 years. You know, two to three years is too short. So I feel my first phase of about 15, 16 is when I set in my mind to become an engineer until about for a decade I was in that pursuit.

And I think at that stage, I felt I became good at it. I used to, I was solving some of the tough technical problems at Cadence and I was getting a lot of joy out of that. Then, as I told you about my switch, I wanted to be a good business person and a good consultant. So I think the next decade was getting the toolkit at IIMA and then learning and applying that at BCG. The decade after that for me was a lot about, you know, now I have learned the toolkit, but I want to inspire.

the next generation of people. So taking some junior partners in my pyramid, going after some of the most bold and ambitious clients, winning in the market, know, just that kind of toolkit. And along with that, I was very actively involved with the work at Adhaar. So also being, you know, kind of thoughtful about giving back even in those days.

And then was a journey of the last decade which was about leadership in BCG. But equally about giving time to something beyond the leadership at BCG to make a foundational difference which was Plaksha. I can look back and give you a decade. I don't think I had a plan like a decade now. It's nice to think like that. But I think therein lies a little bit of a template if I could. You know, to become excellent at something takes time.

So and we sometimes you know and I would Bill Gates I think said it's you overestimate what can happen in two years and underestimate what can happen in 10 years. I think those are profound words. You can say that about technology, you can say that about what we can accomplish in life. I met Abhiraj Bhal yesterday who's the UrbanCo CEO and he used to work with me at BCG and is there up on the you know in the soon hopefully going to do an IPO is what they're planning and he started 10 years ago and it was a very unstructured industry. To create what they've created in a decade is remarkable. So I just quote that example outside, but to say that's a very good marker to take. So I would say, you know, people have many 10 year chapters to play in their life. That can be one template I can leave you with. But in that then go all in. I don't think, you know, that's the other thing I would say. Then really be excellent at what you're doing. Then go all in is important. I don't know if that...

Deepak

No, absolutely. think I'm sort of, as you're reflecting, one of my conversations at the podcast was with Tarun Khanna of Harvard. And he's written a lovely book called Leadership to Last, where he's profiled people who built institutions to last. And one of the questions, and this is specifically in emerging economies. So I asked him, what is it about these leaders that stands out for you? And he said three things. One is audacity of intent. Second is humility of demeanor. Third is steadfastness of purpose. And sort of as I listen to you, somehow I see a living version of those three coming to life. So it's deeply inspiring to hear you talk about all three and sort of the humility in way you come across. And we are talking about building things to last, right? Whether it's BCG or whether it's Plaksha. So clearly, you know, it's a...

Neeraj

That's very kind of you and big of you to say that. I may just add while you're in that phase learn from the best don't hold yourself back like you know is would be my so if you whatever you want to be right I mean if you want to be a photographer then learn want to be the best if you want to be a gymnast to be that or whatever.

Deepak

Just a changing lens, Neeraj. If you had to pass on three principles of living a good life to your kids, what would you say?

Neeraj

Wow, that's... I may take some pauses to reflect. think one I'm very clear about. Respect your elders who've seen more and respect the less privileged who live with less. I think both are very important

and to me that's just one point. I deeply... I think somehow I got that early in my growing up years. So I always feel that has held me the best. If there's even one value I can pass on, I would just stop at that. You know, second...

I would say learn math, learn English and learn history. I mean, I think to me what I meant by that was English is just a metaphor for language. I think was not, I think, you know, not to be taken literally. I think those, the combination of that just is a powerful skill set.

And I feel ego is a big killer, right? I mean, just feel whether you can... So the anti-ego is humility or whatever it is. Just never feel entitled. You know, I think you always... Life gives you more than you deserve, I think, as opposed to less than you deserve. Everybody feels you got less than they deserved. I feel, you know, feel happy with what you got and, you know, aspire big. So keep your eyes on the sky, but the nose on the ground, if I may just say it that way. Yeah.

Deepak

Lovely. That's beautiful. think this podcast Neeraj is titled Play to Potential. You know, this is the question I ask everybody who's been on the podcast. What does the phrase Play to Potential mean to you?

Neeraj

I think firstly it's an incredibly good phrase. I don't say this to any, I genuinely think perform to potential or play to potential. You know, most people I meet, I say there is a performance potential gap that I see in you and your potential is, actualize your potential. So I feel everybody has immense potential and life back to my 20 % shift on the leadership curve was about narrowing the performance potential gap. And it comes from both, most of us, like Buddha said, most of the answers lie within. A lot lies within. so people don't take the time to, know, our life experiences teaches us a lot. But equally, you know, finding enough role models outside, which are outside as well. So I think to me,

Both performance and potential is a, or play to potential is about realizing, having the belief that you have immense potential, but also not signing up for something which is not audacious enough. think it's just that's somewhat rambling, but hopefully that just is.

Deepak

But on that note, Neeraj, it's a real pleasure to meet a friend and to sort of do this. I've been deeply inspired by your journey as a leader and as a person. And thank you for making the time to share your wisdom with us.

Neeraj

I must return. I think what you have done in this podcast genuinely is great. I shared this with all my colleagues in Asia saying and I shared only three podcasts and this was one of them to say this is my

top one and I deeply believe that the wisdom you're creating is eternal and holds an outlast world of AI and outlast the world of everything. So thank you for doing what you do.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

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## 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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