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## Context to the conversation

Jaspreet speaks about how he thought about “flipping the donut” in terms of the mix of earning and learning. He also speaks about how he got provoked in one of the leadership workshops about how he was wearing his work identity too tightly.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** I wanna move to some of the transitions. You've been through Jaspreet. You spent about 22 years across TAS, Microsoft and Mahendra's. And then I would say, if I may use the term, you've been voyaging across different things you've been doing. I'm curious about people's guiding principles. Talk to us a little bit about maybe just at the point of, let's say, coming away from the structured rails of a corporate career. And then just maybe how did you eventually just taking that plunge can be hard for a lot of people and post that, what's been, if I may say what's been the wind around which you've been sailing.

**Jaspreet Bindra (JB):** Sure. It is hard. Okay. It's hard, very hard for people, but the reasons for it being hard are very different, and I'll come to that.

Most of us think that the reasons are about money, the salary at the end of whatever. Okay? But that's not the thing and that's part of the, but. The reason I could do it is because I tried once and it didn't work. And I, so after Microsoft, when I left Microsoft, actually a friend of mine, Kunal Bajaj, who we spoke about and I decided to set up something together. And then due to set up personal circumstances in both our lives, we, and the fact that whatever we had set up wasn't working okay, we put tail between our legs when to do other stuff regular stuff. And that learnings from that first part really helped me when I took the plunge again.

And the two things which were my North Star's guiding principles, whatever the following one is that I realized that if you take this kind of plunge. If you've planned stuff out, it isn't going to work to that plan. Yep. At all. Okay. And that can be very uncomfortable for people who have spent the last 22 years of their life working to plans Okay. And making them work. So this time when I took the plunge, I was very clear and I published it, and it went a little viral. Was that I talked about what I call flipping the donut. And my whole deal was to put it, to kind of make it, to summarize it, was that we, in corporate life, we learn to earn. We don't learn for learning's sake. Okay. So if there's a donut, and if you's, the big central hole is the earning one, and there's a tiny, there's a thin layer of learning around it, which is to support that internal, that earning thing. So you go for training programs, you go for this corporate executive maturity, whatever.

Okay. I wanted to flip that on, which basically says that most of my time and whatever will be spent in the learning part, and there'll be a thin layer of earning to support that learning. Okay. Very interesting. And I've not been true to it always, but largely, and I've been true to it. Even today, what I'm doing is I'm stuck between this I don't scale stuff too much because if I start scaling then you know, my then I deviate from here and that's a big disappointment for many people. So that's one bit. The second is what I realized, and I know you know him, actually Ravi told me this. I didn't believe him at that time, but but, and Ravi had hired me at Microsoft and he continues to remain a difficult mentor, etc.

**DJ:** We need those people. Yeah, we need those.

**JP:** Yeah. And you know what I realized also as a part of his guidance and I realized it myself also, is that what stops you from taking this plunge, frankly, is not the money part though you don't have to have made your money and done it. And even if you've made it, it doesn't make mean that you will do something like this or a structured life or corporate perks or whatever. It's basically your ego. Okay. Basically, your identity is tied to your corporate identity. You don't, you have no identity of your own.

**DJ:** Very true. And you'll start from the foothills, right? Very often.

**JP:** Okay. Yeah. But many years back, as a part of the, in the first 10 years of those 22 years that you spoke about, I was dragged kicking and screaming to a six day, very soft skills, HR kind of camp, which was not up my street at all. A kind of HR based, soft skill based knowing your own self kind of thing-based training program in Goa.

And again, to long story again, I've written about it, but long story short, we were all in a room. And each one was being, was asked to introduce themselves and they said, I'm just Jaspreet from Tata. I'm Deepak from McKinsey. I'm Anuradha from Microsoft and whatever. And one guy at the end said, I'm Sachin. And he didn't say anything else.

And we thought he was a loser. Okay. We kept on trying to ask him, okay, Sachin, what else? And he said. What else what he said, what do you do? And he said, I look after my daughter. Okay. Something similar. And we are like, what a loser. But it turned out he was a facilitator. We didn't know. And he told us that, look, all of you are, frankly, Identity ux. Okay. You have none. No identity. Your identity is tied to your corporate identity. And that's when I, it was an epiphany moment and I started building, I started writing, I started doing stuff. So when I left, I had an identity. Okay. Unlike most people who do not, and therefore their bereft and their ego. When they are at the banks don't give you loans and you're standing at the immigration and instead of saying, I'm Jaspreet Bindra, regional director, Microsoft, you have to just say Jaspreet Bindra, who does some stuff. And so those were my, and therefore I'd gotten this identity thing nailed. And so that's what helped those two things helped me take the plunge.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

**DJ:** Like Jaspreet says, Identity is a big piece of the puzzle when it comes to transitions. Very often we tie our identity to our professional title but we are much more than that.

One of the interesting pieces of insight I would like to share here comes from James Clear (JC), Author of the Book Atomic Habits. He speaks about keeping our identity small as we transition into a new context.

**JC:** *“so I think identity is a huge factor of life but also particularly tied to our habits. So, let’s think about this from a big picture level first. So, you have identities that can build you up, for example, like I am a type of person who reads a lot or I am a type of person who finishes workouts or I am a type of person who finishes what I start and then you also have identities that hold you back. So, something like I am terrible with directions or I am bad at remembering people’s names or I have a sweet tooth or I am bad at math and we are all a collection of identities like there are multiple things that are a part of you like you might say I am a dad, I am a brother and a neighbour and a volunteer, and a teacher or whatever and it’s not just labels that are part of your identity like dad and teacher and friend and neighbour, it’s also those internal beliefs, that narrative that you assign to yourself and the more that you let one of those beliefs take over your entire identity or occupy too large of a portion the more that you are fragile and brittle in that way because if you lose that one thing then it feels like you lose your whole self. So, as an example you often hear this with people who are in the military. They might define themselves part of their identity might be I am a soldier, right, I am a good soldier and then once they leave the military suddenly, they are not that anymore and so there’s this like loss of identity versus sense of self that they feel like it was. On a similar level I felt that when I stopped playing sports. For like 20 years a big part of my identity was I am an athlete and then all of a sudden one year that was the final time I played and then I wake up the next day and what am I not going to play anymore and that’s like whom I was defining myself as. So, I think one way to get around this is that you can focus on the more enduring aspects of a particular identity that you can take with you or carry with you into a new context. So, for example, in the soldier’s case they could say well rather than assigning the identity I am a soldier I could assign identities like I am reliable or I am a good team mate or I have the back of those around me. Well that’s something even once you are not a soldier you can come back into the workforce or go to a business you can still be reliable and be a good team mate and so on. Same way for athletes, they could say something like I am the type of person who trains my body hard or I am consistent and show up to work each day and like you can do the things as an athlete you can do those things as an individual. So, a part of that is the separating of the identity or the defining it in a better way but the other aspect of this and this is the part that you referenced with Paul Graham’s quote “keep your identity small” is that the tighter you claim to any individual identity the harder it becomes to grow beyond it. So, you see this in pretty much any area of life. The tighter you claim to the idea that like a teacher who has been teaching for 20 years and have their lesson plans figured out and it’s like this is the way it is, the tighter you cling to that the harder it becomes to grow beyond that, learn new different learning methods, new learning modalities, change your course structure etc. The surgeon who is like this is the way we do the operation even though there might be a new technology that allows them to do it in no less invasive manner, the tighter you claim to that previous identity the harder it becomes to grow beyond it. And this is one of the real challenges for building habits which is that early on building a new identity is a really valuable thing because it can get you to stick to the habit. So, for example, let’s say that you are not fit right now but you want to start getting in shape, building the identity of I am runner is a really valuable way to get you to stick to that when you are running. But then what happens you know 20 years from now if you injure your knee or your hip and it’s not possible for you to run anymore and now you feel like yeah, you have lost this sense of self and so you need to transition to a new identity. So the process here is not like a line, it’s much more like a circle, you are continually evolving, continually updating and expanding and revising you beliefs and you really need to be committed to doing that and if you can keep your identity small it makes that process easier because it’s like retouching a painting. If your identity is so large that it consumes everything about you then all of a sudden getting rid of that aspect feels like you are tearing yourself in two. So, for all of those reasons keeping your identity small could be a valuable way to continue to grow or evolve and expand.”*

**DJ:** If you wish to go deeper into this topic, you can look up the episode – Connecting the Dots – Identity on Spotify, Apple Podcast or anywhere else you consume this podcast content. Play to

Potential Podcast Members can also access 25+ short form nuggets on Identity from multiple speakers at [www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com).

## End of transcription

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Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [Keeping the identity small](#)

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**Identity:** Identity refers to the reputation, characteristics etc. of a person that makes the individual or the people around him/her think about them in a certain way. To put simply, how do we think of ourselves and what to the others think of us. Identity is a key element that we need to wrestle with during pivotal transitions. Herminia Ibarra shares her insights on how we should treat Identity as a Work in Progress that gets influenced by the journey we go through and the choices we make. Ram Guha speaks about the multiple identities of Gandhiji. Atul Kasbekar speaks about how he saw his identity evolve from being a photographer to a producer. All this and more in this playlist. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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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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