

The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. Next to it are contact details: a WhatsApp icon with the number '+91 85914 52129\*', a Twitter icon with '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with 'playtopotential.com'. To the right, it says 'Also available on:' followed by icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. On the far right is a portrait of the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host' and his name in a red box below. A small disclaimer at the bottom left reads: '\*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

## Context to the conversation

Bill Burnett speaks about how we hold on to some beliefs about careers that might have worked for us given our lived experiences but are irrelevant in the world our children are growing into.

## Transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** I want to move the conversation to some of the, you know, maybe themes you cover in the book, Bill. I read your book, *Design Your Life with a Lot of Interest*. I published a book with Penguin last November titled, *Play the Potential*, where I tried to take a stab at an approach for leading a full life, multi-dimensional life. And I was sort of processing what you've written. Very early on, you talk about dysfunctional beliefs and you actually go on to say that there's an opportunity for us to reframe. And actually along the way in that context, you say only 27 % of the graduates end up pursuing a career in the degree of their choice. And I get that, right? I trained as an engineer and what I do now is so far, I'm in the 73 % for sure. But I just wanted you to maybe throw light on this, what do mean by dysfunctional beliefs and what's the opportunity to reframe here?

**Bill Burnett (BB):** Well, you know, I love the fact that you had play in the title of your book because one dysfunctional belief is that, well, play is for kids. It's frivolous. It's silly. shouldn't be, you know, if you're a serious adult, you shouldn't be playing, which is so wrong. As you know, right, neurologically, we need to play in order to keep parts of our brain healthy. And play is how we learn how you learn as a child, how you continue to learn. So play curiosity, all those things, the dysfunctional belief that that's just frivolous. If you could just blow that up. Your book does a great job, then you realize, wait a minute, what other things have I inherited from society or things that people tell me are true, but they're really not true. So, you know, the fact that play is critical to creativity, to human development and learning, it's not frivolous at all and you should never stop playing. A lot of times people say, you teach the class that helped me figure out what I want to be when I grow up. And I go, well, yes, sort of, except if growing up means you lose your curiosity, you lose your playfulness, you lose your ability to learn, then screw growing up. Like, none of that. So all these things in society that are actually pretty dysfunctional, they lead you to the wrong conclusions. The idea that whatever I majored in in college, I'm going to do for the rest of my life, so I better pick the right thing. Well, the data in the US is that less than 20 % of the people are going to be doing that 10 years from now. And the data is for this young generation that's coming up, they're going to have two or three completely different careers. And in fact, now with AI and stuff coming, they're going to have careers that aren't even invented yet. Right? Right? So, so you pick your major to organize your college experience, but it's not the, like, chill out. It's not a death sentence. You know, I majored in computer science. I have to write code for the rest of my life. Which by the way, I've

been telling my students for about five years, don't major in computer science because it's a dead end. They go, what are you talking about? You get a great job, make a lot of money. go, you can now, but in a few years, watch out. So I think dysfunctional beliefs are things that hold people back. they might have been true at one era of time, but they're not true anymore. You know, I do a lot of advising and young students and they're going, I'm thinking about maybe majoring in design, but my dad really wants me to be a lawyer. My mom and dad really want me to get doctors, lots of doctors in my family. And this is, you know, that's reasonable for parents to sort of try to guide their kids a little bit. Sometimes it gets a little extreme, particularly first gen immigration parents, know, first gen parents from India or China or someplace and have really strong ideas. Yeah, they've grown up the hard way. The really strong ideas about what success looks like and success looks like doctor, lawyer, engineer. Let's not fiddle around with this other stuff. And I go, you know, let's zoom back and reframe, because design is like to reframe. I'm assuming your parents love you. I'm going to assume they're kind people. And I'm going to assume the pressure they're putting on you is because they think they have a solution. They care for you and they want you to be successful and be able to take care of yourself and be able to take care of them when they're older. And so they're pointing you to things that were absolutely proven paths in their generation. The problem is... It's not a proven path anymore. And in the coming generation, particularly AI and stuff, some of those jobs are not even going to exist. So go back to your parents and say, I know you love me and I know you're trying to pick something really good for me, but I think some of your ideas are a little out of date. What I'm hearing from professors and other people who looking at the future is, you know, I should probably be preparing myself for 21st century skills, not 19th century skills. And you look at the World Economic Forum report, you look at other reports, McKinsey's got a report on this. 21st century skills are not these hard-coded jobs that are all transactional. 21st century skills are empathy, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking. That's what you gotta educate your kids on. People come to me and they're really worried. In fact, they're really scared. They're scared that they've got a plan, but they keep hearing AI is going to blow up their job or blow up their... This isn't just students. People in their 20s, 30s, 40s come to me and say, this is terrible. I'm doing a lot of work in Singapore. I'm working with the Singapore government and they're predicting a lot of jobs are going to go away. In Singapore, a lot of the jobs are in logistics, transportation, finance, banking. These are really... know, good jobs, Singapore is amazing. It is only 60, it's just had their 60th anniversary and they have created an incredible economy. But a lot of the economy they've created is transactional, know, moving things or data or money around. Well, those transactional things will be automated easily by AI.

**DJ:** One of my friends has an interesting quote. He's currently the CTO of Citadel, Umesh. We were batch mates in our undergrad. And he has an interesting quote. says, don't hang your coat on skills. Hang it on the problems that you want to solve. Because, you know, whether it's, whether it's being a lawyer or being a doctor is a skill. But if we focus on the problems, then we can bring to bear whatever skills we have, including AI and hopefully be of relevance to the world.

**BB:** Yeah, and including skills you haven't developed yet, skills that will come in the future when you get that job that hasn't even been invented yet. And the way to prepare yourself for that is to think about the problems you want to solve, the strategies you want to employ, how to stay nimble, how to stay fast, how to learn quickly, how to adapt. That's what I want in our design program. That's very much what we teach our students. And so even though I learned that back when dinosaurs roamed the campus, and all the tools, you had to learn drafting when I was a young design engineer, had had to learn, I drew the calculations with a scientific calculator, but none of that stuff exists anymore.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

**DJ:** When I look at my journey, I graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. What I do has nothing to do with what I studied. I went to B School, became a consultant then became a Search Consultant and then a Coach, Sounding Board and a podcaster. There is no way I could have predicted these. Pramath Sinha (PS), currently the Chairman at Ashoka University has a similar view about the role of academics and link with careers.

**PS:** *“In fact, this whole thing about specializing in a subject and then being in a career and aligned to that, as you know, is tenuous. It happens sometimes, but, increasingly, happens less and less. So, while it’s important to major in something, it’s not really that important to major in the right thing. That kind of releases the tension of a lot of parents and children, when they realize. Sometimes they don’t, but most of the times, you can actually show the parents themselves that what they majored in and what they are doing now has no connection.”*

**DJ:** There is a piece around self awareness here. While at some level, this voyaging suggests an element of randomness, I think there an element of intentionality that is required here. The prerequisite for that is self-awareness.

I will say however say that when I was at IIMA, my favourite subject was Organizational Behaviour. Something about topics like Abilene Paradox, Group Think and the nuances in human behavior that caught my attention. My favourite course was Exploring Roles and Identities. It was a group of us going to an offsite location to the Rann of Kutch for a week and having philosophical discussions about life. Bill seems super self-aware in terms of who he is and what drives him and his choices. I would say, I really started my inner journey only into my 30s and 40s and it is work in progress.

Had I tuned into what energized me earlier, may be I would have got here earlier. Or may be not given that I don’t think I could be doing what I am doing without the past experiences as a consultant at McKinsey and EgonZehnder. There a path dependency to the way things play out!

## End of transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

Nugget from Pramath Sinha that is referenced: [Educating ourselves \(and link with leadership of the future\)](#).

## RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Navigational principles:** Leaders discuss their personal frameworks around how they made choices around pivotal moments in their lives. They articulate the set of criteria we should consider having when we are at a fork on the road and have to pick between disparate options. Arguably one of the most critical skills of the future as we navigate a world of abundance. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Reinventing self:** “How do I stay relevant” is a question that all of us have to grapple with as we go through our respective journeys. Careers aren’t linear any more. Some of the leaders talk about how

Podcast Transcript [106.03 Bill Burnett - Dysfunctional beliefs around careers](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

[www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com)

they managed to pivot during their journeys and significantly change trajectories. You can access the playlist [here](#).

## SIGN UP TO OUR COMMUNICATION

**Podcast Newsletter:** Join 1000s of leaders who benefit from the Podcast newsletter. Not more than 1-2 emails a month including keeping you posted on the new content that comes up at the podcast. High on signal, low on noise. Sign up for the podcast newsletter [here](#).

**Nuggets on Whatsapp:** We also have a [Podcast Whatsapp distribution group \(+91 85914 52129\)](#) where we share 2-3 nuggets a week from the Podcast archives to provoke reflection. If that is of interest, please click [here](#) and send a message stating "INTERESTED". Do also add this number to your Phone Contacts so that we can broadcast our messages to you when we share a nugget.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Ricardo Sunderland- Nuggets

- 106.01 Bill Burnett - Formative years and the arc of career
- 106.02 Bill Burnett - Balancing Passion and Pragmatism
- 106.03 Bill Burnett - Dysfunctional beliefs around careers
- 106.04 Bill Burnett - Finding good problems to solve
- 106.05 Bill Burnett - Gravity and Anchor problems
- 106.06 Bill Burnett - Designing a coherent life
- 106.07 Bill Burnett - Journaling energy and engagement
- 106.08 Bill Burnett - Multiple paths to the mountain top

## 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](#).

## Disclaimer and clarification of intent behind the transcripts

This written transcript of the conversation is being made available to make it easier for some people to digest the content in the podcast. Several listeners felt that the written format would be helpful. This may not make sense as an independent document. Very often spoken word does not necessarily read well. Several of the guests have published books and the language in their books might be quite different from the way they speak. We request the readers to appreciate that this transcript is being offered as a service to derive greater value from the podcast content. We request you not to apply journalistic standards to this document.

This document is a transcription obtained through a third party/voice recognition software. There is no claim to accuracy on the content provided in this document, and occasional divergence from the

Podcast Transcript [106.03 Bill Burnett - Dysfunctional beliefs around careers](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

[www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com)

audio file are to be expected. As a transcription, this is not a legal document in itself, and should not be considered binding to advice intelligence, but merely a convenience for reference.

The tags that are used to organize the nuggets in the podcast are evolving and work in progress. You might find that there could be a discrepancy between the nuggets as referenced here and in the actual podcast given this is a static document.

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission.