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## Context to the conversation

Bill Burnett speaks about the idea of coherence and how we all can strive to design a coherent life. He also discusses the markers of a coherent life.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** The other thing that struck me, which is very close to my heart, Bill, is coherence. You talk about, you define it as a combination of who you are, what you believe in, what you're doing, and so on. How have you, you know, how have you gone about finding coherence in your life and what's your, you know, what's your guidance here?

**Bill Burnett (BB):** I think it's really important. Again, you and I both probably talk to folks who, they'll come to you or come to me and they say, I'm very successful but I'm not happy or things are okay but I wish they were better. And I go, okay, well that's a good starting point. mean, if you have the energy to try to make something better then we can start designing. We'll design little prototypes and see what works. When I hear that and then I ask them about it, it's somewhere along the line. I was working, I always wanted to be a teacher, but I ended up in high tech, and then I ended up in marketing, and then I ended up doing this other stuff, and it's just, and I'm just tired, I just wanna do it anymore. I go, why did you wanna be a teacher? I like to help people, I'm a person, I love to learn, and I love to give what I learn away, and I said, okay, is there any of that in your job? No, there's none. All right, so basically the core person that you believe yourself to be is not having a chance to be expressed anywhere in your work? Or do you volunteer at schools? No, I don't have time for that. Okay. So you're out of coherence, right? The, you know, who I think I am and what I'm actually doing in the world don't match up at all. Now it doesn't mean you quit your job and you go teach, you know, first grade. It just means, all right, let's get back to who am I? What's the story I grew up with? What do I do for a living, what's it for? mean, not just what do I do with the job description, what do I think work is for? And then my life view, like what's the purpose of life? I mean, people have a very spiritual sense of life and it's important and there's a plan and in their religion, in their tradition, maybe there's even a plan that is revealed to them by their tradition. And they're working in a law firm helping oil companies destroy the planet, contracts for all companies. Sounds like, so how does that meet your, how does that match up with your spiritual goals? Because you tell me that your spirituality is important, that your soul is the important thing here, but you're doing what you describe, I don't say this because I don't, I let them tell me, don't tell them, our first rule is we don't should on our students, right? I don't tell them what they should do. But I say, you tell me your job is soulless, and yet you say the most important thing you know, is to father your soul. So those are examples of extreme, extreme lack of coherence, and they create a lot of tension, they create a lot of pain, they create a lot of anxiety in people, and then rather than addressing that and trying to put

it back together, they self-medicate with alcohol, they chase the next promotion, they chase more money, they do lots of things to sort of, you know not really look at the problem. But when you actually do these things, it turns out people kind of know what would be a good fit for them. It takes a little work, but they can figure it out. And then the question is just, all right, well, how do we move from where we are to that other place? And that might take years, maybe, or maybe you have enough resources where you can just say thanks to the law firm, cash out your \$4 million bonus and go do something else.

**DJ:** And in your experience, Bill, what are some of the markers of a coherent life? What should people look for, for them to know that they're sort of in the zone of coherence?

**BB:** The first book is called Designing Your Life, How to Build a Well-Lived Joyful Life. So the first thing I'm looking for is joy. Is there joy in your life? Not just happiness. Yeah, I got a new car, I'm happy. I mean, joy, like moments of joy. For me, I have three grandchildren, so spending time with my grandchildren are moments of joy. I'm looking for moments of joy. We have them do a flow journal, sort of a... just a quick one-line journal, rate your energy and engagement every day. And if you don't have moments where you go into flow, where your skills and the task are perfectly aligned and you're just in the zone, if you don't have those, something's wrong. We're missing, some circuit is not connected. So joy, flow. And when I ask you, I mean, this has been 70 years of Gallup surveys say that 70 % of Americans are disengaged from their job. And something like 30 % of those are actively disengaged, like they really hate their job. So, know, so if we, where are the moments of joy, where are the moments of flow? And typically you'll find that those are not in your job. They're elsewhere. They are with your grandchildren. Or when you go out in the garden and you plant some plants or something. And so I got, great, hold onto those feelings, because those are feelings of a coherent person doing a thing that brings them joy or flow, or meaning or purpose. Now let's dive into the job. What's missing there? How do we wire that or rewire that? jobs aren't set up for meaning. They're set up to get stuff done and make money. But you can make jobs meaningful. Any job can have meaning. So I look for joy, flow, and then when they do the life view and work view, where's the joy and flow in your life and where's the joy and flow in your work? And people who have can identify that and then you double down, do more of the same, you try to eliminate the things that create the friction. All the same things you do in a good, in a good design. Eliminate the friction, you know, isolate the good stuff and you get more of it. That's how you do it.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

**DJ:** I like what Bill says. Gravity problems are just circumstance. You just need to acknowledge and move past it.

I came across an interesting anchor problem recently. I am coaching an individual who just moved on from a senior role in a pedigreed consulting firm. One of the things that emerged from the feedback was that this person may not enjoy building out a large people intensive business but would thrive in a small set up with high quality people solving tough problems. As we were evaluating various pathways, one option that we were evaluating was starting a boutique advisory firm. To which this person said, I am done with Services, I want to start a Products business! As I listened to him describe this, it occurred to me that the mirror image of a services business is not necessarily a products business. May be it is a spectrum of things. Then we got onto a discussion about what it was about the Services business that really didn't sit well with him and then we

realized that there were many feasible pathways that could play to his strengths and would be energizing, not just a products business.

## 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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