



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 '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with '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 a man in a suit and glasses, identified as 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman'. At the bottom left of the banner, a small note 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 the fact that there is no one pathway but many possibilities that can unfold for us. Letting go of that “this is what I am meant to be doing” can be liberating.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): One of the statements that stayed with me in your book, Bill, you say, I quote, we all contain enough energy and talents and interests to live many different types of lives, all of which could be authentic and interesting and productive. Asking which life is best is like asking whether it's better to have hands or feet. Can you talk a little bit about that? Because I come across a lot of people, to your point about what I'm meant to be doing, there's an element of...

Bill Burnett (BB): Yeah. Singularity, right? There's no like, yeah. Right. I gotta find the perfect thing I'm doing in this only one thing, right? Gosh, you know, I mean, for some people, you know, I think Bill Damon, who runs the center for the study of adolescents here at Stanford, and he wrote a great book called path to purpose. There are some people it's only less than 20% he found that are truly, you know, designed for like, I am going to be a doctor, I always wanted to be a doctor. I don't know why when I was three year old I wanted to be a doctor. I still want to be a doctor, I'm a doctor. But most of those people actually, in his study, the people in the 20%, I really want to be an artist, I really want to be a dancer, I really want to be a singer, I really want to be a designer. And of course their parents say, well that's not a real job, you shouldn't want that. But the people who are driven by a singular idea, oftentimes this is in the arts. For everybody else, it's like, well look, I've got more lives in me than I'll ever express. I could be this guy, that guy, this guy, that guy. So the question isn't optimizing, the question is coherence, the question is joy, the question is flow. But there's lots and lots of ways to the top of that mountain. And when you're trying to optimize the perfect way, you're missing out on all the possible great ways. There's lots of great ways, but you're trying to find the perfect way. Well, you know perfection is the enemy of the possible. it's also, if you were a fixed being, if you were exactly the same at 20 and 40 and 50 and 60 and none of your desires, none of your curiosities ever changed, then maybe there is one thing for you. But I'm a lot different guy after raising three kids. I'm not the same guy I was before I was raised. Certainly not the same person I was at 18 when I picked my major at Stanford. Certainly not the same person I was at 45 when I decided to quit a computer manufacturer, Apple Computer, and go out and start my own consulting firm. So I change, you change. There is no singular version of Deepak. don't you, isn't that kind of cool? You could learn and change and become, you could. Want to spend your time and attention on new things. So what are we on? Am I optimizing? At 18, was I optimizing my corporate self? I didn't even know if I was gonna have a corporate self. When I was in my corporate life, was I optimizing my

professor self? I didn't even know I was gonna be a professor. So this idea of a singular thing seems limiting versus the, hey, there's more than one life in you and your goal isn't to optimize the singular one, it's to find the many good ones. And then to this process, know, design process of prototyping, stuff, find the one that's actually possible. Because, you know, yeah, there many lives in you, but some of those lives don't make any money. Some of those lives don't end up with a family. Some of those lives, you know, there's a lot that you learn as you get older. One more thing, it's slightly different than your question. I apologize for talking too much, but in our new book, which is called *How to Live a Meaningful Life*, we looked into the Maslow's pyramid, right? The Maslow's pyramid, by sort of normal, people would say, well, Maslow's pyramid, the top is self-actualization, to be all that you can be, to fully actualize every part of yourself, which doesn't necessarily imply singularity, but it is, you know, like, I would say fully actualized is fully coherent. But it turns out, before he died, a couple years before he died, in his journals, Maslow said, that's not it, I got it wrong. The top of the pyramid after self-actualization is self-transcendence. Because of course, it's about going beyond the ego and beyond the self. Now, that's true in every wisdom tradition I know on the planet. It's called compassion. It's called getting out of your own ego and doing something for others in the world addressing, you suffering and whatever, you know, inequality or just addressing beauty and the transcendent things about the world. And so if where we're going is transcendence, you can't tell me there's only one path. There's a lot of paths to the top of that mountain, right?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I had the privilege of speaking with Marshall Goldsmith (MG), one of the most celebrated Executive Coaches. He refers to an interesting Buddhist idea about each breath leading to a new version of ourselves.

MG: *“Deepak, okay, take a deep breath, take a deeper breath. Now, a good Buddhist principle is this, every time I take a deep breath it’s a new me, it’s a new me. And everything in your life is done by an infinite set of people. Their names were the previous Deepak’s, the previous you. Close your eyes. I want you to think of all the previous Deepak’s, think of all the gifts they have given you just listening to me talk right now. Think about how hard those people tried; think about all they did to help other people. Open your eyes. Now if any group of people did that many nice things what should you say to those nice people?”*

DJ: Thank you.

MG: *Doing it, thank you, and thank you. Now, did they make a little mistake or two over the years? Let go, let go. Now back to your question, moving forward. The Deepak I am talking to I am writing a new book called *the Earned Life*, the Deepak I am talking to right now, you haven’t earned one thing, and you have earned nothing. Almost everything you have has been inherited; it’s a gift from the previous Deepak’s. You didn’t earn a thing, they did. The guy I am talking to, you haven’t earned anything. Now you have to ask yourself what this person is going to earn. What is this person going to earn moving forward?”*

DJ: I love this framing from Marshall. He speaks about each breath being a new version of us and in a way urges us to earn our relevance afresh with gratitude for the past.

DJ: I came across another interesting perspective from Prof Jeffrey Pfeffer of Stanford (JP). We were talking about authenticity and it being true to self. And he provocatively asked “true to which self”

JP: *“This goes back to this whole thing about authenticity, you need to be true to your inner self or your true self, but I would hope that most human beings are on a journey of learning and development and that Deepak at your current age, whatever that is because you look amazingly young to me, is not exactly the same person as Deepak a 10 or 5 or 20 or 25 or 30. My hope would be, from our conversation, my belief would be that you have been on a journey of learning and self-discovery and that you have been on a journey of growth and development, and so that therefore, when you say be true to yourself. If you are really true to yourself, you are basically not going to be on a journey of growth and development because you are going to say I have to be true to my one-year-old self which basically does not use the toilet. That is an extreme example but you get the point.*

DJ: Back to what Bill says, it is useful not get consumed with one identity or say, “I am like this only” and get stuck to a label. The more fluid we are to our evolving self and not bound it with any limiting adjectives, greater the chances of us discovering possibilities and playing to our potential.

End of transcription

Nugget from Marshall Goldsmith that is referenced: [Staying relevant over the long term.](#)

Nugget from Jeffrey Pfeffer that is referenced: [True to which Self?](#)

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

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](#).

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 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.