



Guest

Hitendra Wadhwa is a professor at Columbia Business School, founder of the Mentora Institute, and author of Inner Mastery, Outer Impact. His work explores how leaders create meaningful change by developing their inner core.

In this conversation, he challenges traditional ideas of leadership by shifting the focus from traits and competencies to the activation of inner states. He explains why leadership is often defined in small, high-stakes human moments and how these moments shape outcomes more than grand strategies.

Drawing from over 15 years of research, Hitendra introduces the idea of “breakthrough moments” and shares how leaders can consistently create them through simple, intentional actions rooted in deeper awareness.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the next conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman. My mission is to help growth minded people play to their potential through my Coaching work and through the content I create, whether it is this podcast, or a the book Play to Potential or the journal – Crafting a full life or other pieces of content I produce.

It has been about 10 years at the podcast and when we started we were one of the few podcasts in India and now podcasting is a bit like what blogging was a decade back. We have been reflecting on why we do what we do and what makes us differentiated.

The why is that I see this podcast as a long term journey of learning as a student of human experiences, transitions and potential. Hopefully, we will keep marching as long as we can.

What makes us different. Well, three things in my mind.

- 1) Focus – Our focus is on three themes - Leadership, Transitions and Careers; We don't want to have an opinion on everything under the sun
- 2) Miniaturization – We believe we are the only podcast in the world where we break down a conversation into smaller nuggets and then reorganize the nuggets by theme so that in a world of abundant content, Play to Potential members are able to access contextual content; whatever you are seeking; Go to playtopotential.com and see Curated Playlists to understand what I mean

3) HSBC Tag line – Think Global, Act Local – We tap into some of the leading thinkers in the world and some of the leaders in India across sectors ranging from Business, Photography, Stand up, Music, Sport and much more.

Thanks for your support and look forward to your companionship as we march forward. My guest this time is Hitendra Wadhwa. Hitendra is a professor at Columbia Business School where he teaches 'Personal Leadership & Success'—one of the most popular and over-enrolled courses in the school's history. As the founder of the Mentora Institute, Hitendra has spent over 15 years researching how the world's most iconic leaders achieved great things by first achieving inner mastery. He is the author of the acclaimed book Inner Mastery, Outer Impact and a frequent contributor to the Harvard Business Review, including a recent cover story on leading in the flow of work."

Hitendra blends a mathematician's rigour with a truth seeker's spirit in the way he looks at the human condition. The conversation contains many moments you might find interesting.

- 1) Leadership is about activating states rather than acquiring traits
- 2) We all operate at different points of a bell curve at a point in time; Rather than plotting different people on a bell curve, it is useful to look at our bell curve and see where we want to operate
- 3) How Gorbachev handled a tricky conversation with Margaret Thatcher which changed the course of the relationship between the two countries

I love the fact that he distils complex human behaviours into a smaller atomic structure of mini actions that we can take which could be activated by a deeper energy source. Just like James Clear wrote Atomic Habits, Hitendra's work could be called Atomic Leadership! Without further ado, let us listen and learn from Hitendra Wadhwa.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Hey, Hitendra, thank you so much for taking the time to come on the Play to Potential podcast. We met a few months back, but it's wonderful to host you on the podcast now.

Hitendra Wadhwa (HW): Wonderful. Thank you for having me. It's a joy and pleasure to be here with you and our listeners.

DJ: Lovely. Over the course of the conversation, of course, I'd love to cover the insights from your book that I really found super useful. But before that, I'm a student of journeys, Hitendra. I'd love to get a sense of where you come from, your early years, and then maybe we'll get into some of the transitions. But if you can give us a sense of maybe before we go there, what you do now, just for the listeners to get a sense of where you come from. And then I'd love for you to recount some of the formative years and how they've shaped you.

HW: Sure, sure. So I teach at the business school at Columbia. My focus is on a sort of new model for leadership. I also have an institute I formed called Mentora Institute, where we are seeking to activate a form of spiritually awakened change making in the world. Certainly leadership, but also more broadly change making in the world. My roots. Well, you know, I grew up in, you know,

sometimes I like to tell people, you know, I grew up in India, Sometimes I like to tell people that I grew up in a country which is so incredibly beautiful on the inside, you know, and sometimes it can be a little bit of a mess on the outside. And I come to United States, which I did after college, and I found a world that was razzle dazzle, you know so beautiful on the outside. And sometimes it can be a little bit of a mess on the inside. And so, in some ways that sort of has helped define my mission, which is, I would love to be able to create communities, homes, individuals, organizations, nations, a global civilization that can be beautiful on the inside and beautiful on the outside. And in fact, where outer beauty emanates from inner beauty. So, India is very much the story of my roots. was very grateful to have had a upbringing very early in my life when I was about 10 years old my parents You know experienced a kind of spiritual awakening and transformation. They'd always been you know fairly religious and sort of ordained to was like this idea of sort of relationship with God but then I was 10 years old or so their God swept off their feet by the teachings of Yogananda and deeper invitation it offered towards the pursuit of self-realization, the community it offered, both of lay disciples as well as swamis and mahas, know, nuns as well. And we were living in Calcutta at that time and it was fantastic, sort of opening up to me about how they can be a global family of truth seekers, know, mystics who are striving to want to have a direct personal experience, know, something beautiful, you know, at the very core of their being. And So Yogananda became in a sense my spiritual foundation, right from that age and has been since, which I feel so blessed for. I had the outer passions and of hungers of any or all of us. I know you have a highly accomplished audience amongst your listeners. And I was inspired by that, by the outer accomplishments in humanity. So, I went to St. Stephen's in New Delhi and started math honours and really sought to excel and fully, fully, imbibe that discipline of mathematics. Then I came to the United States to get an MBA and a PhD and then, yeah, the rest is history.

DJ: Wow, I mean, just to maybe play out those transitions, right? MBA, PhD at MIT, McKinsey, you were at a tech startup, and I'm sure I'm missing many more milestones now you're teaching at Columbia. If you can give us a sense of maybe how you thought about some of these transitions. I feel life is accumulation of choices around where to go and how to grow. So, I'd love to maybe double click on some of these where to go choices if you could take us back to those junctions.

HW: I'd be happy to and I also want to recognize, I know I'm speaking to somebody who has made some major transitions in his own life after conquering many peaks, you know, so and I have the highest respect for you in that regard.

DJ: Thank you. Thank you. Conquering Peaks, I'm not sure, but definitely interesting transitions.

HW: So I think, in some ways the first transition was to leave pure mathematics, you know, from college to go into applied mathematics. When I was at MIT, I studied management science, as they call it. I had sort of repackaging of the idea of operations research, mathematical modeling business. That itself was actually, for me, at that time, a big leap, moving away from that purity, pure mathematics. And I did that because I really wanted to engage a little bit more actively with, sort of say, real world problems. And for a while, it was OK. But then I realized even that was a little bit confining and limiting to me. So I got my MBA to, you broadened my horizons even more, decided not to join academia after my PhD because I wanted to further engage in a sense like the real world. And so that's when I joined McKinsey and it was a huge growth cut for me, know, the few years at McKinsey because I went away finally, finally from my very quantitative roots into these, you know it well, you you've been part of that world into this world of the strategic and the organizational and

the behavioural and communication and all of that. So was a beautiful learning growth experience for me. And initially it came with a lot of struggle because I was so fond of mathematical models and variables and equations and patterns and purity and all of the stuff you get in mathematics. But over time, I realized that I left mathematics, but it never left me. And there is a discipline that it gives you around precision and pattern recognition and the search for essentialism, the axioms, the core truths, the minimal.

DJ: If I may come in here for 30 seconds. of my coachees was sort of at a transition and she was also quite quantitatively oriented. And finally, long story short, our discussion came to can we design, can we think of a linear programming model and we define an objective function and the constraints. And it sort of was immensely clarifying to go back to sort of the purity of the mathematical model. And in a way it sort of brought a lot of clarity to how she was beginning to think about choices and the constraints. So sorry, back to you. There's something pure about math.

HW: I love it. love it. And I mean, you know, let me also honor those of us who come with other passions for other disciplines because Leonardo da Vinci said it beautifully. You know, he said like, study the art and science and study the science and art and then approach every problem as though everything connects to everything else. Everything connects to everything else. And from that vantage point, I love it when I see people who very fond of theatre or the arts or biology or any of these disciplines because I think it's fascinating to see the whole world, see all of life, see leadership, see everything through that lens, through that lens. And it's almost like God has given each of us some unique divine sort of gift or capacity through which to view the world, right? In our own sort of these special ways. So mathematics has been it for me, has been it for me. And my hero there was Ramanujan because he also embodies another of my passions from early days, which is mysticism. This idea of a form of transcendence where we can awaken our consciousness to a unity with all of creation in the universe. that mathematics can emanate really from the very soul of our being in a way that is instinctual and automatic and more flowing through us rather than something that we construct or engineer.

DJ: And just to maybe understand in what ways does Ramanujan embody some of these things?

HW: Well, know, so a few things. So he was a very mystical man, very mystical man. I mean, he barely had any real formal study of mathematics. He was a clerk in Chennai and then, you know, he starts to just divine these equations almost. And he sends them out to, you know, a few mathematicians who ignored his letters because he was an unknown, just, you know, government clerk. And then he ends up finding, you know, this one, know, Hardy, know, this mathematician in Cambridge who's actually you know, able to pay attention to these letters and say like, wow, he said there were all these equations there, some of whom are very familiar to me. So, they were not new. And then others were new. But with a little bit of effort, I could prove them myself so I could see that this person was on the right track. And then he said, and then there were others which were so profound and beyond my reach that I just had to believe they were true. You know, they couldn't just have been fictionally constructed by somebody. And so that's when he wrote to Ramanujan and started to engage in a correspondence that ultimately led to Ramanujan coming to Cambridge and doing some more of a seminar of collaborations and work there. And his wife would say that sometimes he would just wake up in the middle of the night and he would say, I have to write these equations. I have to write these equations. The divine mother has come to me and she's just given these to me. And a lot of his work therefore lacks the traditional mathematical discipline of proofs.

We all learn proofs. When we were in high school, Euclidean geometry and all that, how to construct a proof step by step. But he never learned the art of proof giving. And so, these things would just come to him. And there has been a whole generation of mathematicians after Ramanujan's passing who discovered his lost diaries. And in that, discovered just tons of these equations. Incredibly intricate, almost works of art in the kind of patterns and all that they reveal. And they made it their whole career, their whole PhD and beyond, was around seeking to prove or disprove those equations because he left no proof. And what they found is that about 95 % or so of those equations were proved to be correct with all this toil and effort by these mathematicians. Now, if that person is not activating some mystic instinct of being able to connect with these mathematical equations which are invisibly just written out there in the ether, then you tell me what else is going on there.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I like what Hitendra says. You moved away from Mathematics but he took his mathematical lens with him wherever he went. I learnt something interesting from my chat with Rama Bijapurkar (RB), a Board Member and Author.

RB: *"today there is much more joy to be had the confluence of the things and so when people say ohh my daughter is doing Psychology, I am like great you can either going to consumer or neuroscience or to the consumer behaviour you can go into HR you can go into designing interfaces in a tech company you can do so many things so you have to have core, which is why I find this BBA kind of educations a little bit dangerous because like my academic friends tell me as well if you have studied economics your mind is wired in one particular way to learn so how does your mind fundamentally get wired and you can take the wiring somewhere else, so if you have studied anthropology and sociology your mind is wired in particular way and that is also part of your core skill, your ability to see it through the lens of your training and that is the whole purpose of education, so just understanding this will make it just a little more will make it more better."*

DJ: Given the context of future careers where there are so many moving pieces, I guess early education, is often much more about developing a lens through which we see the world than being wedded to a certain discipline.

Thank you for listening.

DJ: I wasn't aware of, I knew about Ramanujan's mathematical prowess, but this divine element was something I was not aware of. Wow. Just shifting gears, Hitendra, you know, as I read the book, one of the things that strikes about your work, strikes me about your work, is just the focus on the micro rather than the macro, you know? And I think you talk about a conversation with David Burns specifically, where you talk about the pain gain ratio. But I'd love for you to I think it's a paradigm shift in the way we think about leadership. Let's focus on the atom and not the big building. If you can just sort of, maybe give us a sense of the building blocks.

HW: Yeah, I love your observation there. Thank you for catching that. See, the higher we go in organizations, the greater ambitions we have in life, the smarter we are told we are, right? All through school, college and all that. By the time we end up in a top business school, we just have this air that we are the chosen few. And the faculty reinforce that idea they themselves see

themselves as the chosen few. And so it is assumed that the way therefore to master the discipline of business, particularly leadership, is going to be by engaging with vast sweeping stories, ideas, case studies, and all of that. So you have a case in front of you with 30 pages, 17 exhibits, and you're meant to analyse the case and do strategic thinking. But after all, you are meant to do top level strategic work. So, you might as well actually get trained into that right here by these big sweeping conglomerate case studies and all that.

DJ: But people are looking out of the balcony, the first paragraph is like, you're sort of poring over the oceans and you're figuring out where the world is going kind of stuff.

HW: Yes, exactly. Right. And I grew up in a different type of embodied sort of university of spiritual seekers. And Yogananda again comes back into focus for me that there, the goal is in some ways even more luminous and even more imposing, which is self-realization. For those of us who may wonder what that word means, mean, at least this is how Yogananda defines it, right? He says self-realization is the knowing in body, mind and soul that you are one with the omnipresence of God, that you do not have to pray to get it, that you're not really near it all the time, but that God's omnipresence is your Omnipresence. That you are as much a part of that father, that mother today as you will ever be. And all you have to do is improve your knowing. You know, I mean, that's a pretty lofty kind of, know, kind of peak to try to climb, you know, that you are one with the Omnipresence of God. But, you know, rather than try to invite you into that journey through vast sweeping sort of accounts of, you know, God realized people. What he did was laid down a path and the path starts with practices and those practices start with small steps patiently that you have to do and you have to earn your way nine months into consistently doing certain steps to actually make it to the prime technique of Kriya Yoga, know, that you're meant to get at that point, assuming that you've actually been doing, you know, some of the basic foundation building work, et cetera. And then it becomes a lifelong journey and you never stop learning until you reach that incredible peak of what they call Sarbhikalpa and then Nirbhikalpa samadhi. And that's a pretty amazing peak to reach. I sort of had grown up with that sort of recognition that that's how you go from wherever we are in life into a step-by-step journey towards enlightenment and illumination. So when I saw the way leadership was being taught, I rebelled against it. And I found it to be you know, very sort of airy, right? And fairy, not as grounded. And then I said, you know, what could be analogues that my peers and my students would relate to? Maybe not as much the self-realization journey, but at least the journey of being a tennis player. You don't end up becoming a Federer or a Nadal by, you know, reading a case study on a Wimbledon match between two players and then read exhibits and, you know, how their previous game has gone and debate as to whether they should play a forehand or a backhand. You actually are meant to go into the court and have a coach there to kind of work with you on your forehand, on your backhand, again and again and again and again. And yes, the crowds will come and yes, the television will come and yes, the competition will come, but that'll come at the right time. Initially in a humble way, you know, do those microcosm things, right? So you break it, you whether it's to learn the piano, you don't immediately, you know, get to think about being in Carnegie Hall and playing, you know, a Beethoven sonata to an applauding audience you just learn how to basically play the chords, know, and play the melody, know, and et cetera, et cetera, Yeah, so that's been sort of my sort of realization that leadership too can be approached and studied and gradually mastered through the lens of the microcosm. I call them breakthrough moments. You breakthrough moments are where suddenly a highly unexpectedly positive outcome is achieved in a negotiation to make it a win-win thing or in resolving a conflict or in delivering hard news, but in a way that is actually warmly accepted by the other party, or in delivering critical feedback, again, in a

way that the other party actually opens themselves up to, rather than sees you as somebody judging them or being unfair to them or whatever, or building human connection relatively deeply and quickly and all of that. So, I collect these breakthrough moments stories that different leaders in different moments in time have executed and demonstrated the capacity in us as human beings to generate positive unexpected results, right? And through a library of these kinds of stories that we've collected over the years, we've basically been analyzing the patterns of what kinds of mindsets and behaviors get people to those kinds of outcomes and what can you and I and all of us learn and replicate in that step-by-step journey.

DJ: And I'd love for you to share a couple of them, Hitendra. One is, think, the one thing that struck me was the Thatcher versus Gorbachev story that you talk about. And the other one is about Mandela and the general. I think those two stories stayed with me. Just for the listeners to appreciate what you mean by breakthrough moments, can you share just these two anecdotes for people to get a sense of what the breakthrough could be?

HW: Yeah, yeah. Thank you. Yeah, I mean, they're so rich in learnings, really, and inspiration. So the Thatcher-Gorbachev moment happens at a time when there was this epic meeting between both of them in the prime minister's estate outside London. And Thatcher was at that time being extremely sort of like assertive, aggressive, cynical, know, about communism and the USSR and, you know, all of that. And so she was asserting herself in that way. And Gorbachev ultimately, you know, he is representing his state. He is representing that that that system. And he's getting very uncomfortable about it. You know, at one point, you know, he and his wife exchanged glances. And it's almost like she's telling him like we should like walk out of here because of the disrespect that Thatcher was showing. And then Gorbachev says, I shifted my thinking, I changed my perspective. She is hosting us. She is speaking from a place of passion about something she believes in. And I reframed it that way for me. he said, and then the way I responded was that I just smiled at her and I said, Madam Prime Minister I just wanted to reassure you that I have not been sent here by the USSR Politburo to seek to convert you to communism. I just wanted to reassure you. And she, you she it was such an outlandish idea that she just burst into laughter, you know, just as you were doing right now. And that was it. You know, that moment, that laughter, that light-heartedness, it sort of just melted, you know, that that sort of ferocity and cynicism from her side and the conversation took a different turn. And from there on, they started to become more collegial and more friends. And this whole idea about trying to convert him into moving away from communism basically just kind of left her mind. And she then went on to write to Ronald Reagan and talk about how she thinks that in Gorbachev, they have somebody that they can actually deal with, that they can actually engage with and communicate with. And it became the starting point of a path that ultimately got taken by both sides, Russia and the West, to ultimately come to a lot of trust and understanding in terms of leading ultimately to the dismantlement of the USSR regime, and in particular, the commitments both sides made towards nuclear disarmament, a big issue at that time. So that was that story, you know you can imagine a breakthrough moment in that sense that you've got this, know, prime minister of this other country kind of just lambasting your system, you're feeling extremely irked about it, almost ready to walk away and yet literally three, five minutes later, you have a whole different outcome, a more positive outcome.

DJ: Fascinating. Do you want to talk about the Mandela story briefly and then I'd love to explore a few of them.

HW: Okay, yes, so the Mandela story. So there is this general vision. He is a white who happens to be very, very concerned about the emerging move of South Africa towards a democratic regime where in effect the black population would likely take over power. And he's concerned about that because he is concerned that this will mean quite a disaster for the whites. And so supported by a number of whites, he is making a lot of noise about mutinying against the emerging new democratic, you know, government in South Africa, or which likely the leader would be Mandela. And he wants to basically carve out a piece of the country for whites so that that can be protected land for the whites.

Mandela would have nothing of that. So that's the context of this conversation and so Mandela had invited him over and they were going to meet and talk and immediately he goes off into how you know, Mr Mandela you realize that you know, mean like he has direct control over these highly well-resourced trained people in the army And so, you know, he was kind of more or less threatening Mandela that time Mandela, you know makes him sit down pours him a cup of tea himself and then says you know general he says you are right. You are too well-resourced, too well-trained. There is no way that we could win in any kind of military struggle against you. And he says, and you will also not be able to win. Because look at it. We will escape into the jungle, and we will engage in guerrilla kind of warfare against you. And the whole world will turn seriously against you. So you'll have all this outside pressure as well. And what will happen to our country? It will become a living hell. It will become a living hell. And for your own people, is that what you want, General? Is that what you want? And that was it. The General turned around and started to accept the terms from Mandela that it will be one nation and not two and at the same time, were reassurances that he wanted to give the white population that he wasn't going to do anything extreme and revengeful against them, et cetera. But again, you should kind of like what a beautiful example of a breakthrough moment of the microcosm being so rich in the lessons and insights it can give us. And so I've been basically analyzing these kinds of stories like Gorbachev's story and this story to understand essentially. How do you and I, how can we get ourselves into a situation where we can also consistently deliver to that kinds of breakthrough outcomes?

DJ: And you say you've catalogued more than 1000 such micro moments. And what I find beautiful, I mean, you spoke about proving Euclidean geometry, but it felt like moving from Cartesian system to the polar system, right? XYZ to R theta. It's almost like a different paradigm with which we look at. So can you talk a little bit about just maybe the overall, if I may say structure, the thousand broken into five subcategories further broken into 25 states. I really loved that sort of, if I may say that menu card of possibilities in terms of how we can pick a certain approach and then work with it. I'd love for you to lay out the structure.

HW: Yeah, yeah. I mean, thank you. It's been a journey. It's been 15, 18 years in the making since I started. And it started at a very, very sort of basic level. And I look back now and smile at some of the early sort of constructs and then revise them, refine them, replace them, destroy some of them to continue to evolve, continue to evolve. And it's a It's remarkable because sometimes, you start to get an insight and you realize, my God, if I buy into this insight and start moving down this path, I'm going to have to invalidate years of having taken a certain road, I'm to have to invalidate all of that. There are all these investments you have made in that, these curricula you might have developed, there's some writing you may have done, et cetera, et cetera, and you're going to have to walk away from that. And I faced that issue a few years ago when this model started to really emerge more clearly and sharply for me. So yeah, let me share briefly the model. mean, one analogy I would give, again, going into the arena of mathematics, you described it beautifully in that transition from sort

one you know, know, form of sort of mapping, you know, the dimensions to another form. But there's a book written by a mathematician, it's a novel called Flatland.

DJ: Flat land, is it?

HW: Flat land, flat land, And it was written years ago, and I remember encountering it in college. And the idea of there being a novel written by a mathematician was kind cool. And basically, it's a two-dimensional world that he describes, where you and I would be sort of like circles or squares or rectangles. And then we coexist. We have our tribes, and life goes on. And suddenly, a three-dimensional being comes into their world, a sphere, which projects into just being a circle and so for them, it's just a circle, right? But to this sphere, they're like, you don't get it. There's a beautiful third dimension. Do you realize that there is a third dimension? Like, what do you mean third dimension? Like, come on, everything is two dimensional. You are two dimensional. I everything. Like, no, no, no, no. I'm not two dimensional. I'm three dimensional. And by the way, so might be you. Maybe you're only seeing a shadow of who you truly are. And these people are rolling their eyes and just wondering, what is he talking about? know, like strange sounding guy and I mean, it's just a beautiful sort of metaphor for how in business do in modern times We have operated in a flat land, you flatland where we have obsessed with these two dimensions of behavior and performance. Behavior and performance. Behavior and performance. How is the leader behaving? How are people behaving? And what kind of performance are we getting from them? And if the right performance is not beginning, what do we do to change the behavior? But there's a third dimension. The third dimension is the inner life of the person. The inner life of the person. And at the very core of their inner life is their soul. Is their soul. their Atma. I call it their inner core the inner core, I call it the space where the highest potential exists, where they are beyond ego and attachment and insecurities. And when they're there, then they're just inspired to be very noble and very open and fluid and adaptive and without many attachments and wise. So that's the core. And I've never found a single person across all the faiths in the world and the secular communities, I've never found anybody coming to me and saying, hey, Hitendra, I object to that because I don't have a core. I don't have a core. Now that doesn't mean that people are always at their core, right? So we drift into it and we drift out of it, we come close to it and we go far from it. And so what is it that gets us to be close to it? What is it that gets us to activate the core? That is the structure where I found it very valuable to think of it, not in terms of behaviors that get you to be at the core, but energies. Energies come before behaviors. Energies are the intentions that you bring into the room, the emotions and the mindsets and the thoughts and the beliefs that percolate through your mind all the time. Those things activate a certain energy. They could be an energy of love. You know, a great empathy, connection, compassion, warmth, know, shared sense of like a joint quest. Or there could be an energy of purpose, know, a nobility of intent, a desire to elevate and do really great things and go on hero's journeys. And that's the purpose, you know, purpose energy, kind of like karma yoga. You the first one love is like bhakti yoga then there's the energy of wisdom, this hunger to want to seek the truth. And doesn't matter where truth comes from. The youngest person, the junior most person, the quiet person that you have to draw in, the one who's contradicting you and challenging you, maybe you know part of the truth, but they know some other part of the truth. It's so beautiful that oath that they take in the court system of, I swear to tell the truth, only the truth. What is it? The truth, the whole truth, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. You sometimes we are very, very sort of invested and passionate about our position. You this project has to be launched. You this person has to be hired. We need to actually cut costs by 10%, whatever it is. That might be the truth, but is it the whole truth or are there other dimensions to it? Right. And also, is it nothing

but the truth or are there parts of it which are actually false? Right. So wisdom is this energy, the Jnani yoga energy of questing to discover the truth in all matters. Wisdom, purpose, love, the fourth is self-realization, this Raj Yoga like energy of stillness, mindfulness, of spirit, of recognizing that the very core of your being, you are the core, the soul, and letting intuitive guidance come to you from there, letting rejuvenation come to you from there, letting joy come to you from there. And then the fifth and final that I added to my model is growth. This idea that life is inviting us to be ever expanding in our capacities, ever fluid and open and adaptive and awakening new possibilities and capacities individually as well as collectively as a team, as an organization or a nation. So those are the five energies. And so the last bit is translating those energies into actual behaviors on the outside, right? So take it from the inner to the outer. And for that, I resisted the idea of sort of directly translating these energies into how to have a difficult conversation, how to give feedback, or how to this or how to that. Because when I analyzed these Mandela and Gorbachev-like situations, what I found is that ultimately, they were doing just one thing. They were activating the soul capacities in the Margaret Thrasher's and the General Bill Jones. And you activate that soul capacity through these energies, through simple, small actions. Simple, small actions. And I found recurrently that there were about 25 of them, these simple, small actions that these leaders constantly seem to use to get to their breakthrough moments. Now, when I say an action, I mean something really simple and small. Like, for example, you're in the middle of a feedback conversation with somebody and you realize that this person is getting a little uncomfortable. And so you immediately switch the energy a little bit away from the giving that you're doing about like, you know, this kind of behavior from your side is very counterproductive in the meetings because you don't assert yourself in a, you know, effective enough way. And other people, you know, just jump in with all their comments and you lose control over the meeting. And I'm trying to make you a better facilitator to give you more empowerment so that I can step back. But you know, you're not really driving results and outcomes in these meetings. Maybe that's my feedback to you. But if I'm finding that you're getting uncomfortable in my saying that, I might just switch to the action of appreciation. And I might say something like, so and so. mean, one thing I really appreciate about you is what a good listener you are, how patient you are in understanding and accommodating every thought and opinion in the room. And there are situations where we're doing creative work, where we have deep strategic problem solving to do. It is important for us to create that space for a while. And at the same time, there's these operational review meetings, and they have to go on a certain structured cadence, and certain things have to be accomplished. And those are not the times for us to engage in these expansive, fully inclusive conversations. And so I love that energy from you. And you must continue to protect it and use it in these situations. And in these situations, it's important that you develop this other muscle. And so that's this quick little illustration of the action of appreciation. It took maybe 30 seconds to do but it communicates a genuine intent from your side. I'm not here to judge you. I'm not putting your career at risk. I am not trying to write you off. I am not against you. I actually love and support you so much that I'm actually honoring and appreciating even while I'm also lighting a fire in you at the same time. So if you just take one action, like appreciate and just really get to master it and understand its applications and the genuineness and power of 30 seconds of just doing that, right? Then that's what I mean. Similarly, there are these other actions. That's what I think to me makes a great data.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Whenever we think of leadership, we think of elements like competencies (Result orientation, Strategic Orientation, Collaboration, Team Leadership and so on). But I haven't come across a systematic catalog of micro-behaviours that are MECE (Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive). Hitendra's menu card of micro actions is a great place to see where we need to build muscle. I also love what Hitendra says about the 3rd dimension which comes from our core. In a way the performance and behaviours are manifestations of what emerges from the core. The other way to digest this is that I feel very often Leadership is seen in the realm of doing but Hitendra's work gives us an opportunity to look at Leadership also in the realm of who we are being.

DJ: Lovely. And you talk about a certain set of practices for us to center ourselves and maybe being intentional about picking from this menu card. But before we go there, are we saying that everybody has access to all these five in equal measure? Or do you think we're all born with more of one, less of the other? Just to get a sense of the organizing, let's say, the framework. One thing that wasn't very apparent for me was, do we have default preferences in terms of how we are wired that gets us to pick from one of these buckets a little more often than the other buckets?

HW: Yeah, again, just such a thoughtful question. See, Western psychology has seen us as basically a human being with a certain kind of wiring to us. Whether that wiring has been nature or nurture, that can be analyzed and studied and certain aspects might be more nature and some might be more nurture. But fundamentally, the only thing that they've been sort of focused on is nature versus nurture in the context of the wired human being. Now, there are two things about that model which are limiting. The first is that you and I, don't only have one set of, know, wirings in us. We have multiple wirings in us, right? And I say that with all respect to Carol Dweck and the work on the growth mindset and the fact that neuroplasticity shows that even if we are not something today through repeated practice, we can actually grow into being that tomorrow. And therefore, let's actually approach things from a growth mindset. If somebody tells us you're not a very empathetic manager, that if you're truly intentional about it, that you can work towards developing more effectiveness in the way you patiently listen and affirm and empathize and all of that. So that's the world I'm talking about. The psychologists have basically envision that we have certain wiring patterns and maybe with some neuroplasticity we can change them, right? When I say we have multiple wiring patterns, you one of the preeminent psychologists over the last 50 years, Walter Michel, who did the Stanford marshmallow experiments and who was here a colleague of ours at Columbia, you know, he and one of his doctoral students, know, and future faculty, I they said it beautifully. They said, actually speaking, you know, this construct is very limiting because, you know, we are not one personality, we have multiple personas. Each of us has multiple personas depending on who you're with and what the situation is and what you're feeling and what you're thinking. You you'll be one kind of person or you'll be another kind of person. You know, the same manager who is considered to be not very empathetic at work probably goes home and pets their pet dog, you know, with a lot of warmth, know, and hugs their daughter with a lot of warmth. Right. So it's not that they are missing the neural pathways of empathy. They are just not activating them in certain situations where they're talking to subordinates and they're a little bit irritated at work. They're not active anymore.

DJ: What does, I mean, you've used activating quite a few times, right? Activating states rather than acquiring traits is a phrase that you use. Can you maybe shine the light on what, how do we

activate? How do we intentionally activate certain states as we sort of build a muscle moving forward?

HW: Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So look, a lot of this has to do with intention. With what intention are we approaching a situation? And I'll just give you an example. Let's say you're in a certain situation and you're getting really angry with the customer service agent or something somewhere, and you're blasting them. All you have to do is visualize that there is somebody who is very important to you in your life, that you give them a very positive impression of you being a very calm and collected person. This could be a board member in your organization or something. Just visualize that they are standing behind you. Almost immediately your anger comes down. Your capacity to actually handle the moment with more love. Yeah, yeah, yeah, your regulatory capacity goes up. And where does that come from? It just comes from the intention. When you, so for example, I'll give you another example. I just want to kind of drive this point home because it's so contradicting, right? Some of these limiting stories that painfully so even modern scientists have told us about ourselves, right? So, the Myers-Briggs, right? It tells you you're an extrovert, you're an introvert. At McKinsey, it was a favorite instrument, right? Very early in your career, you were given the Myers-Briggs and told to analyze yourself and other relationships through that. I respect it, and in some ways there was some help I got from it, but it was also a very limiting instrument, right? So when it says that you're an introvert or you're an extrovert, really? Okay, you're an introvert. So that means your natural energy and natural thing is to be a little bit quieter and understated. really? Okay. So now let's say you're walking in the streets of Manhattan and you are holding the arm of a child, could be your child or could be a nephew or a niece, and they pull away from you and they start running down the street and there's traffic there, right? Let's say you're an introvert. In that moment, will you feel more true to yourself, more natural if you were just quiet and shy and didn't attract any public attention? Or if you just shouted at the top of your voice, please save my child and Tommy come back. Who cared? Who's listening, not listening and what your public impression is, you would just do because you deeply cared. You deeply cared. And so there are all these neural pathways that are available for us, we just don't seem to necessarily use them always in the most optimal ways. So that's this model, right? This model is that we have multiple neural pathways in us, not just one personality. We have multiple personas in us. If we are intentional about it and aware of it, which by the way, subconsciously we are doing all the time, we might be very polite in certain situations and kind of rude in other situations, very patient in some situations, impatient in other situations. Maybe dominantly so at work, are very patient. We come home and we become impatient with our child. So they view us in that impatient way. Those people view us in a patient way. So that's one thing I want to of open ourselves up to is that we have multiple capacities, intentions allow us to activate the right capacities. The second observation I want to share is that, again, the Western model only sees us as human, but the mystic model sees us as actually the soul, sees us as spirit embodied in the human form. So we are not, as this beautiful mystic from France once said, We're not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience. And when you think of it that way, then you realize that if you really work on accessing that potential at the very core of being, a soul, then we might be pleasantly surprised at how quickly we can access love and wisdom and courage and clarity and whatever it is that we need. And that was the Gandhian way. That was the Gandhian way. That he did it not just for himself, but he waved a magic wand and for a period of time, 300 million Indians got mesmerized. And for a while, even the British and ultimately the rest of the world by his magic touch. Meanwhile, he's this seemingly scrawny man in basic white piece of cloth and then you and I think we have to dress in a certain way to show up in a certain way and get accepted in a certain way in society but he had these Britishers eating from his hands. He

had America fawning over him, know, sending the journalists and their black civil rights activists to India to kind of learn from him, right? So that notion of sort of like inner charisma that arises partly because of the activation of the very soul of your being but partly because through that you actually help people get to activate the very core of their being. There was this friend of this journalist, American journalist who the American journalists reported later, said, upon Gandhi's assassination and his cremation and the grieving and all that happened, he said there was such a heaviness of heart and he was asking what Gandhi's impact on the country was. he said, the friend told him, said, to understand Gandhi, you have to understand that he was basically like a mirror who was holding us to the image of our own perfection within. Our own perfection within.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love what Hitendra says. We all have multiple capacities. We are not unidimensional. If we apply the right intention, we can activate different states within us. Something similar came up in my conversation with Vinay Sitapati Ep2 (VS) (Author of books like Half Lion and Jugalbandi). He speaks about how some of these leaders are multi-layered and we cannot paint them with a wide brush. We need to be able to look at them with all the complexity and the seeming contradictions they come with.

VS: *"I realised that when you look at grand figures and I think Vajpayee was a grand figure, you see lot of contradictions within, a lot of them. So, Narasimha Rao for example was a visionary. He was also petty and corrupt and rather than have a linear view of understanding them as either or the answer is, they have a bit of both. So, Vajpayee was a careerist, he was an opportunist and he was ruthless to those within the party who he didn't agree with, ruthless, whether it was ML Sondhi, Balraj Madhok, Subramaniam Swamy, Nanaji Deshmukh, Govindacharya, list of people whose careers have been destroyed by Vajpayee within the party itself. On the other hand, Vajpayee was in some sense a liberal. He had extraordinarily good parliamentary etiquette, he had friends across the political aisle, his own critics said that he is half a congressman, there's a grain of truth to that in the sense that he cultivated these relationships. I talk about in the book in some detail, he had an unorthodox relationship, and he lived with this woman, a fascinating figure Rajkumari Kaul, who was an intellectual liberalising influence on him and her husband for 30 to 40 years. So, he was a complex figure. So, what I try to do in this book is to reduce this view of like the right man in the wrong party, which is what he was called like a liberal in the wrong party saying that he was as complicit or as opportunist as the rest of them, but he also had these moments of extraordinary greatness and as Prime Minister, he definitely had a grand view of India. He didn't have a petty view of India and I just have reconciled myself after studying Narasimha Rao that when you look at these kind of grand figures you have to be comfortable with their many contradictions, their pettiness as well as their large-heartedness. And the two of them coexist in figures such as this."*

DJ: Back to what Hitendra says, I guess we are all a bundle of capacities and we can activate the right state with the appropriate intention. I hope you are finding this conversation meaningful. If you are finding it useful, do rate and review on Spotify, Apple or any other platform where you consume this content.

DJ: Hitendra, I want to move slightly to a different topic. I want to sort of double-click on the framework. You spoke about five types of energy and in your work, you've sort of codified each of

these energies and you've got four or five or seven, depending on totally 25, what do you say, behaviors or actions. I want to sort of maybe pick a couple just to sort of give listeners a sense of what these could be. The one that struck me was fusing opposing viewpoints. You might have touched upon it in the way I think Mandela might have approached that situation. I wonder if that's the case in point, but I'm curious, you know, you, you call that as being part of the wisdom energy. Can you sort of embellish that? And then the other one that struck me was push, pull, pause and pivot, which comes from purpose energy. If you want to sort of talk about these two with maybe a small story.

HW: Yeah, yeah, you know, thank you. I mean, look, this is not entirely new in the field of leadership studies, this notion that, you know, good leaders are able to sort of embrace paradox, embrace paradox, right? Paradoxes, by the way, something that very early in my sort of interest in mathematics, you know, became like an area I was just super fond of, you know, and typically what we find is that there are these paradoxes in mathematics, you know, and then the only way to address them is by going into another dimension and, you know, being able to critique and analyze and understand the holes and gaps in the logic of that system in which the paradox initially came up, you know. So that's one thing that really attracted me. And so what I found over time, is that actually speaking creation life is just full of paradoxes. It's just full of paradoxes even where you are not seeing it, it's there. And yes, at the level of sort of leadership conversations and truth seeking, which is to me in some ways, you know, the simplest place to analyze and practice this capacity to fuse opposites. I'll share one example of an even more nuanced and intricate place to do it. But just if you look at it in terms of leadership situations, like the Mandela one that you said, that general is saying, look, we'll defeat you. Mandela wants to strike some fear in the general's heart. And he knows that he can't do it by telling the general, it is such a wrong thing, the system of apartheid, and what have you done? He knows that that's not going to help. So how does he do that to somebody who is convinced that they have more firepower and if he threatens aggression, that he's going to win, right? And so what Mandela does is basically says, you know, there's a truth in what he's saying, which is that we cannot win. But there is also another truth to it, which is that given the world pressure and our ability to kind of retreat and then keep waging a fight, retreat and keep waging a fight, we may not be able to win, but we can make sure that they also not able to win. The country becomes a living hell. And if nothing else, maybe that is going to shake him out of his complacency. And so he arrives at a new dimension. He arrives at a new dimension. Rather than trying to argue with him to say, no, no, no, no, we'll have the world on our side. No, no, no, the British will actually send forces in our support. No, no, no, no, I mean, we are better, you're a war-fighter. No, no, no, no, no. You're right. You're right. We're not going to be able to win against you. And you're also not going to...

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Its fascinating to hear what Hitendra is saying in the context of what we are seeing with the situation with US, Israel and Iran. So much of what he says is applicable in this context! One side may not win but the paradox is that the other side may not win too.

I love Hitendra's point about paradoxes. One of our upcoming guests is Wendy Smith, somebody who has studied paradoxes for many years and co-authored the book titled Both/And Thinking - Her

work is exactly what Hitendra speaks about. When you have a problem in one plane, you some time need to go to another plane to bring a new perspective to the problem.

DJ: And I that accessing a different dimension is a wonderful sort of meta insight in terms how to sort of reconcile paradoxes.

HW: Yeah, because see, it's very important. Otherwise, what happens is you live with the insecurity that if I accept some truth in what they're saying, that means I'll have to give up my truth because it's an either or because we have been taught, you know, this language of binary, right? That if, you know, something is true, then its opposite is false. Right. And so if what I believe is true and this person is opposing me, I have to argue that person out of it because it has to be false. It has to be false because otherwise, if that's true, then I'm going to lose what's true to me. But this fusing opposite liberates you from that fear. It liberates you from that fear. He said, no, no, no, actually two opposing things can be true at the same time. Two opposing things can be true at same time. Now let me offer a challenge. I mean, this might be more than you bargained for, but just to highlight almost like the spiritual power of this idea, the spiritual power of this idea. See Victor Frankl, this amazing psychotherapist who constructed this logo therapy. The therapy through meaning making in people's lives. He once shared the story, said this elderly gentleman had come to him probably in his 80s at that time and said, Dr. So-and-so, please help me. I am besides myself with grief because my wife of 62 years passed away recently. You we had so much of loving relationship. She was with me all these years. We were inseparable and now she's gone. And he said that, I asked him, I said, sir, what if your wife had survived and you had passed away? How would she be feeling right now? And he says, what do mean, doctor? You know we were married for 62 years. We were deeply in love. You we were inseparable. Of course, she would be in great pain, just like I'm in great pain, I'm sure. So he said that then I told him, well, then then do you see how your pain is in fact your gift to her? He said, what do mean? He said, because one of you had to die at some point first and the other one would have been left with the pain. And by surviving her, by choosing to survive her, you have chosen to take that burden rather than have her take that burden. So you have saved her from that burden. He said that was it. That allowed him to make peace with his grief because in his grieving, in his pain was actually satisfaction was actually satisfaction. I have, by the way, found the opposite to be true as well. I'm sometimes with my daughter, who's 23 now. So we made this journey with our children. And there is such a lot of love, such a lot of tenderness, such a lot of sweetness, such a lot of affection, connection, shared memories, all of that you have. And the more joy I feel, the more I realize, my God, it is this joy. That is going to make me feel so much pain when that moment comes, when it's the last time that I'm keeping my eyes open. Steve Jobs' sister, she had this beautiful obituary of him at his memorial service published as an op-ed in the New York Times where she talked about how he finally was in his dying moments, looking lovingly at all the people around and gradually came to his children and then to his wife and then his eyes shut forever. Somehow that has just left a very vivid sort of scene in my mind and I hope it is I who died before my daughter does. But in that moment, it is because there has been so much joy that there will be that pain, right? If there wasn't that joy, there would be no pain because then you are indifferent, right? So in joy, there is pain and in pain, there is joy and gratitude and appreciation, right? So the world is actually constructed of these, you know, silent invisible binaries which can be fused because they're actually the same.

DJ: I think it's just so powerful. You know, I was just wondering, clearly the fusing, opposing viewpoints, Nelson Mandela example is wonderful. Do you want to maybe, since we spoke about the example that Thatcher versus Gorbachev, do you want to sort of embellish what that was? What sort of behavior, sorry, I use the wrong word. What are the each of the actions?

HW: Yes actions, what actions, by the way, the reason I, the reason I differentiate between actions and behavior is because typically, you know, in the business world, we've constructed these leadership competency models and we talk about the idea of, know, what behaviors do we want from our people? Or they should be able to have constructive candor or they should be able to have a high trust in the team, et cetera. These things like high trust and constructive candor and, know, these, these are sort of fairly ambitious and... you know, multi action modalities. Each of them is kind of like, yeah, there's a bundle of actions, you know, that goes into it. And that's why since I'm trying to get to the elemental level, right, I had to use a different word for that element, right? And the word I found...

DJ: Sort of sigma of action is a behavior, right? Yeah, you're right, you're right. True, true. got it. The moment in time, what do you do kind of a thing.

HW: Yeah, for a few seconds, just to activate that little bit of energy, that little bit of love energy, a little bit of wisdom energy. And it's the combination of those things that in total will be the behavior, but it's a string of actions, right? So that's why I use the word action. So yeah, so in the Gorbachev thing, first he used an action of reframing the situation, where rather than see it as how horrible she is being, I'm a guest here and therefore I must you know, now leave to defend my system, you know, rather than that, he reframed it to be, she's being passionate about something she really believes in. And by the way, I'm passionate about the things I believe in. And so we're actually the same, you know, deeply passionate about the things we believe in. And she's hosting me here. Let me honor my host by actually just respectfully opening her up to seeing things in a different way. And so that was the first action, create the right frame. You can also say there was an action of affiliation, which is both of us are the same. You know, wait a second, you have the complete opposite. You know, she's for the capitalist democratic system, you're for the communist system. No, no, but we're the same because we are both passionate about what we believe in. So that's affiliation, finding common ground. It opens people up to more empathy, more understanding, more patience, more trust for the other party. It can be any form of common ground that you find with them. You don't have to believe in everything or, you know, align on anything, everything, but at least something. Then the third was he sparked joy. He sparked joy through humor in that case. Just, know, through that thing, you know, Madam Prime Minister, I mean, please let me reassure you I'm not here to convert you, you know, to, to, you know, to the communist system, right? Yeah, et cetera, right? And so those are examples of some of the actions he was using.

DJ: Just I think maybe staying with this structure, Hitendra, do you have any suggestion on how people can order this menu card of 25? I have a situation I'm getting into. How do I pick the one, two, or three actions to lead with? Is that a, do you suggest? A certain approach for us to pick from the menu card thoughtfully rather than just, know, otherwise it can be a little overwhelming. How does, how does one contextualize this menu card to the moment we are in?

HW: Yeah, yeah. You you also earlier asked whether some come on more naturally to some of us than others. I did want to more fully answer the question, which I think is perfectly natural for some

to come on naturally to some than others. And it's one of the genius of India's system of human spiritual growth, right? That when they actually don't have a single rigid formula for how you should evolve your way towards self-realization, you know, things the Bhakti Yoga movement, the Jnana Yoga movement, the Karma Yoga movement, etc. which might appeal to different people, with different sort of propensities towards them. And I respect that very much, that you want to inspire somebody, you can inspire them through taking them on a hero's journey through the purpose lens, or you can inspire them through being very logical and being very, very clear in your articulation about the steps they can take in a wisdom-oriented way, or invite them to their own growth into the highest potential. There are multiple ways to inspire people, and different people may be able to therefore tap different energies and different actions. Now to your point about how do you quickly in the moment when things are going in a certain direction and you have to intervene somehow as an act of leadership, how do you know which actions to use and when? Well, the first step towards that is, so I had this Harvard Business Review article I published where I published these 25 actions. I also published a method there. And that method was something I discovered works like a charm. And what it says is that, rather than rush from one meeting to the next to the next, right? If you can pause for about 10 minutes before critical meetings, not for every meeting, but if you look at the week ahead, and during the week there are these two meetings, you're gonna be presenting to the board here, you're gonna be having a critical meeting with a customer, or you know, really have to have a hard conversation with one of your, you know, executive team leaders in on your team. Well, for those two or three conversations, you would just pause for 10 minutes and you ask yourself, how am I feeling emotionally about it? How am I feeling emotionally about it? And make sure you create a positive intention. Get out of a feeling of like, oh, why do I have to deal with this? Or this person never gets it. Or I'm just never going to be able to get this through the board, rather than that negative or kind of, you know disruptive kind of emotional energy, you ask them, no, there are these possibilities. I could actually deepen my understanding. I could run this experiment. You know, I could offer this up and then wait and watch. You this is the first step of a seven-step journey I could take with them, et cetera. Whatever it is that allows you to feel empowered and aged and energized, you know, about what that moment is. You have to, you have to, for every interaction, conversation, meeting, presentation, speech, et cetera, approach it from a place of possibilities and positivity because if not, then you've written it off and write this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. That person truly doesn't end up trusting you. That group doesn't allow you to have a voice. know, that conflict is not resolved, et cetera, because you just enter the meeting already having written off the possibilities, right? So the positive intention setting you can do for about two, three minutes. And then you go into, but what's my goal here? What is the outcome I'm looking for? You know what? I want to be able to have a hard conversation, but also in a way that is lovingly received and agreed on. And along the way, I might discover something the person hasn't told me yet, or I haven't understood yet. So I must be open to also some amount of discovery and adapting my sort of, you know, kind of stand based on what I discovered there. Okay, so that's my goal. If that's my goal, now what actions will help me? You know, there's the action about understand before you act. You know, the action about expressing myself, but very thoughtfully in the time and the tone and the space and place I do it in. So, etc. And so, you spend two, three minutes, after you've done the goal setting, to shop around across these 25 to pick those actions. And then you spend the last three, five minutes basically almost visualizing in your head how the conversation will go, what might come up, how will you respond with this action or that action. And that's it. And I found in my research that when executives do that, they just get so much more consistent breakthroughs. And they feel like, wow, I can't believe it. I was able to actually approach the situation very calmly or I approached it much more lovingly or I was able to use these actions. And then the other person responded so much

more gracefully, so much more openly, so much more. I was pleasantly surprised to see their behaviour in a certain way. It's quite beautiful. Yogananda once said, said, you want people to be peaceful, become the most peaceful version of yourself. You want people to be loving, become the most loving version of yourself. You know, so that's what I've learned in this, you know, in this, in this sort of research is that when people pause for 10 minutes and retreat and return to their soul and activate, you know, intentionally one or more of these energies use these actions when they go into the meeting to help the other person also activate them. They are just pleasantly surprised with how quickly, you know, performance and leadership being a state, not a trait as you've observed, you know, that I like to like to say how quickly they're able to get closer to breakthroughs. The point is, though, we rush from one meeting to the next, right, to the next to the next, and we focus on the PowerPoint slides and we focus on the Excel spreadsheets. We do not focus on the human part of the equation. We don't create that pause for about 10 minutes, right? And so we think that it's not possible.

DJ: I love what you said. I think you, you talk about, you know, very often the bell curve is used as a curve to distinguish between people. But I love the fact that you say each one of us is a bell curve. And even here, can you become the most loving version of yourself? It's almost like saying in that bell curve of your actions, can you sort of move to the right end and sort of become the, so I think that that's, again, I found that as a, as a wonderful way to reframe how we think about bell curves. Can we sort of move towards the optimal end of our individual bell curves.

HW: Yes, yes, you know, as one wise person said it beautifully once, you I contain multitudes. I contain multitudes, right? And if you respect that, by the way, the more you start respecting that about yourself, the more you start seeing other people through that lens too. This person is acting rudely or this person is acting lazily or is unmotivated or is political. But actually, that's just a state, not a trait, you know, and, and, and, and, and, you know, there's a reason why people like Steve Jobs and Gandhi and Mother Teresa, they were able to activate the most creative part of a person, the most calm part of a person, the most compassionate part of a person. Because they saw the bell curve and they saw a high potential part of the bell curve and somehow, they were able to get, at least temporarily, they were able to get that part out of people.

DJ: Of course. Hitendra. This is a wonderful conversation. can keep going. But you alluded to the word potential. This podcast is titled Play to Potential. One question I always ask the people I talk to is what does the term, what does the phrase play to potential mean to you given the work you do and given your thinking in this space?

HW: You know, I define self-realization for you. To me, nothing short of that would ever have satisfied me from the age of about 10 onwards. I would look at the stars out there and feel I was connected to them. I felt a hunger to be connected to every human being, not just from today, but from the past and the future and all of life really. And so to me, your highest potential is that self-realization state from Yogananda, where you are one with the only presence of God. And when you say play to potential to me, it means get in touch with your soul potential, you know, get in touch not just with your human potential, but your soul potential, because it's beautiful. It's beautiful.

DJ: Lovely.

HW: And I want to thank you for what a joyful, joyful conversation. And I would have loved to just turn the tables and had it the other way and brought so much of your grace and depth and wisdom out as well. Deepak, really appreciate all you've done to make this a little rewarding for me.

DJ: Thank you. Thank you, Hitendra. Thank you for the work you're doing and for making time for this podcast. Really learned a lot from it. Thank you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I hope you found this conversation as meaningful as I did. If you want to dig into his work, you can look up his book

Among the many things Hitendra says, I love his insight around paradoxes. One of our upcoming guests is Wendy Smith, somebody who has studied paradoxes for many years and co-authored the book titled Both/And Thinking - Her work is exactly what Hitendra speaks about. When you have a problem in one plane, you some time need to go to another plane to bring a new perspective to the problem. I hope to publish that in a few weeks, do look out for that conversation.

If you liked this conversation, you might also like my conversation with Ricardo Sunderland and with Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi. Ricardo speaks about peeling our layers and getting to the core which has infinite energy which can power us. Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi is a Monk who is currently at MIT. He speaks about his journey where he walks away from home based on a dream when he was a 10 year old child and eventually finds his way to a monastery and then speaks about how leaning into the mystery and the unknown has got him to where he is.

Do also take a moment to rate and review the show on Apple, Spotify or wherever you consume the content.

There are also a couple of elements of the Play to Potential content ecosystem you might like.

- If you like the podcast, you might also like the book – Play to Potential – Lead a full life, Become the best you that is now a National Bestseller

- On the back of the book we have also created a journal or a playbook for Crafting a full life where you have 52 weeks, curated audio nuggets for each week and a set of journaling prompts for you to reflect on.

Bye now.

End of transcription

Nugget from Rama Bijapurkar that is referenced: [In summary – Playing to Potential.](#)

Nugget from Vinay Sitapati EP2 that is referenced: [Getting comfortable with contradictions.](#)

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stakeholders want, getting a sense of when the timing is right and driving the change you want by influencing the various constituents. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Managing Conflict: Conflict – How we manage conflict is an essential life skill and no one teaches us how to handle conflict productively. Multiple perspectives around how we can engage in healthy conflict that can lead to better outcomes. 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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