



Guest

Viral Doshi is one of India's pioneers in career and college counselling. Since 2004, he has guided more than 30,000 students through decisions around careers, college admissions and higher education. While the counselling industry has expanded rapidly, Viral has deliberately chosen to remain highly personalised, focusing on excellence over scale.

In this conversation, he reflects on his transition from running a manufacturing business to building a career around mentoring young people. He shares how changing economic realities, evolving education systems and the rise of AI are reshaping how students and parents should think about careers.

Drawing from over two decades of experience, Viral challenges several conventional assumptions around undergraduate education, career planning and success. He offers practical frameworks for making better educational choices while staying grounded in passion, aptitude and long-term thinking.

Context to the conversation

Back in 2016, when I stepped out on my own after some years in McKinsey and EgonZehnder, I decided to focus on transitions as I felt those are passages of play where the problems are complex, stakes are high and people are often lonely and need a sounding board. Over the last 10 odd years, I have had an opportunity to be a Trusted Advisor for leaders who are solving for what next in their journey.

I recently caught up with some of my mentors and friends to get some feedback and to get some guidance on how I should think about the next decade of my practice. Two of them, Govind Iyer and Gaurav Gupta looked at me and said that given my aspirations for my practice, my benchmark for the future and role model should be Viral Doshi.

In case you have not heard of him, he is the pioneer in the space of early career counselling especially in the context of college selection after 12th. He started his practice around 2004 and has touched more than 30,000 students over the years.

Despite, this space of career and college counselling booming over the last several years with the entry of many players, Viral has chosen to be a surgeon, not build a hospital and focus on excellence rather than scale. To use his words, he has taken a Rolex approach than a Swatch approach.

I am excited to feature Viral in the next episode of the Play to Potential podcast. In this conversation we speak about how Viral transitioned from making Super Alloys to counselling Children. He also shares how he has thought about many of his choices in the way he has built his practice, his perspectives on how students should think about their first degree and their second degree and their

early years of career. We also speak about how we should think about our education and careers in the context of AI.

Without further ado, let's listen and learn from the one and only Viral Doshi.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Viral Thank you so much for taking the time and for coming on the Play to Potential podcast. Real honour to be spending time with you.

Viral Doshi (VD): My pleasure.

(DJ): I've heard so much about you. And you know the legend of Viral Doshi though she is sort of well-known across the country. But it's wonderful to sort of understand your journey. I think you've helped many people on that journey, but this one's a little more about your views on your journey and maybe your reflections on where careers are headed, actually, maybe a good place to start. Viral, could be going back in time. If you could talk a little bit about your formative years, what shaped you? If you looked at your first 15-20 years and look at who you are now, how much of who you are now got shaped in what ways in those years?

(VD): I think let's go back into history in my schooling at Cathedral showing you that coffee table book, which I had published in 2010, finished my ISC way back in 1975. That time we didn't have an international curriculum that all Indian curriculum either do ISC, CBS or S.S.C. correct? I was the last batch of a previous to that. We had the senior Cambridge in India.

We became the ISC and we finished in 1975. At that time, my father fell. Look here, you run the ISC, why don't you get some exposure to England? So I did my A-levels in England. At that time, when your father was an engineer, you had no other choice but to become an engineer because there was no other choice available to you.

So I did physics, chemistry match A-levels. And at that point of time, inflection was, what should I do? Should I stay back in England, go to America? My father had settled in America. I said, yes, you want to study in England? Because when you go to England to study, your teachers more or less brainwashed you to stay back in England to do your university.

So, you know, you come to America, you'll see that it's a great choice to be went off to America, went to Cornell, did my under graduate degree in engineering sometimes I ask myself, why did I do engineering? I could have done psychology. He could have done education. But I guess that time you had no opportunities in these areas, and your father would have told you, what do you do after that?

So it came down to engineering and a lovely time at Cornell, after Cornell obviously had the bug of getting into finance, because in those days in America, the two things which were popular after graduation was consulting or go into finance. Yes. So had a little bit of a experience in finance, working with Manufacturers Hanover Trust Bank, which doesn't exist anymore.

Chase has bought it out, worked there for two years, but always wanted to come back to India so came back to India in the mid-80s. And at that time, if you go back into history for any engineer, one thing you would love to do is to set up his own small scale unit. So my father being engineer, me being engineer, if I set up a Super Alloys plant in the mid-80s, sometime mid-80s, late 80s. Making super alloys is a cobalt and nickel alloys.

(DJ): And the customers for this would be.

(VD): customers would be people you know who want corrosion resistant electrodes. You want to like big companies, steel making companies who require corrosion resistance for all their basically nickel and cobalt alloys are corrosion resistance. So basically anybody who's making pumps, who's making products which are which have high corrosion, they would use cobalt and nickel alloys. Started the company way in late 80s, had a great run for 7 or 8 years.

There was a competition from China imports coming in a big way. We started making losses and one fine day around late, around late mid-90s, late 90s, we decided to close down the plant because we're making huge losses. And we decided so that then if I go back, go back to the 80s, when I did come back in the mid-80s, I used to help a lot of my friends, friends, children with, you know, they wanted to talk about careers.

It was just a passion, which I had. And especially at that time when you were applying abroad, you didn't have a opportunity to go to the internet and find out it was going to USIS going through the books and finding out which college to apply to, how to apply. Very antiquated.

(DJ): Much more friction.

(VD): Absolutely. And that's the time I was helping a lot of people, just deciding on career paths and going abroad. As a matter of fact, very proud to say that one of the first students I sent was Fareed Zakaria, who's now a TV anchor at CNN. And so I used to do this as a hobby. And when we shut down the plant, I started thinking, now what do I really want to do?

And I felt my passion lay with helping children. And I saw in India it was just sending children abroad so nobody to mentor them. So what I wanted to do was something very different. Of course, going abroad wasn't part of the whole story is to mentor young minds about career path. People are so confused what career paths to fall.

I saw my confusion as if I could do something. Let me help other children. So around early 2000s, because we shut down our plant in 1998, it took me 4 or 5 years to wind up everything because you know how it is in India. And then around 2004, I took a change in pivot into something which I was passionate about was helping children.

So we were all started around 2004. It's been now more than 22 years. Guiding children, helping children. So we started initially doing career guidance. What we do with children is we do career counseling.

We make them undertake a psychometric test where we analyze a child's strengths and weaknesses, interest and aptitude. Typically, we start this in grade 9-10 and based on the psychometric tests, we

are able to plan out career maps. What they can do after grade 12. Then we map out a career map for a child for four years in high school and then help them with the college applications.

But one thing led to another. Then when they entered college, they wanted me help me with the postgraduate studies. So it became a virtual, became a life mentor to these children that they started with me at 18 and they would be with me till 24. And after that also, they would keep in touch with me. As a matter of fact, I'm so proud that I'm helping their children now to go to colleges and look at career paths.

And over the years we grew. I think we were able to piggyback on the growth in India education and from doing psychometric testing, doing college applications, we ventured into helping schools and colleges with setting up career counseling units, giving talks all over the country to people on careers and career planning. And eventually one thing led to another. And now we have offices in Singapore, Dubai, London and New York. So I spend one week every month in these countries. Gives me a good perspective of what's happening in the world market around me. It's been a very exciting journey, and I think I've been very lucky that not very many people have a chance to convert into a second career, and my passion became a profession.

It's a chance, I guess you get once in a lifetime. I am lucky to have had that. And I will rise the wave in India with rising affluence, the education will become a big thing in India, as you know. So I've been very fortunate, very happy. I think what it really gives me happiness to see what I'm, what I have done and what I have been able to do. I think that's a joy which you get in this business.

(DJ): Absolutely. And, and I'm sure deeply fulfilling in a way, such a pivotal role in setting people up for success.

(VD): Yes, absolutely.

(DJ): And that the gratitude they would have, I'm sure, is Sort of

(VD): It's amazing. When people ask you what gives you satisfaction? I say, when I meet somebody in a movie theatre and say, oh, thank you so much, I have become this because thanks to your guidance just makes you feel so happy. Or you have a younger sibling who's come to me because the elder sibling was so happy makes you very happy. So I think that satisfaction of taking these small buds and making them grow into what they are today, the tremendous sense of satisfaction.

(DJ): If I could, we will take you back to that moment. In this podcast, we are curious about three themes. One is leadership, the other is transitions, and third is careers and journeys. Going back to that transition, when you shut down the unit and 2004, you said you started this. Yes. Let's say 2003, 2002, as you were thinking of pathways, what were some of the pathways you briefly considered but did not pursue before you? Because it's a with, with hindsight, it looks like an obvious choice, but at that time it's a it's a non-trivial shift of direction.

(VD): You know, honestly, manufacturing in those years was quite challenging. You always wonder whether government was supporting you or they were against you, because I counted one point of time when we were doing manufacturing, we had close to 16 inspectors we used to count to be.

(DJ): 16?

(VD): 16 inspectors from income tax inspector, excise inspector, water inspector, power inspector, and it's just becoming too much. That's why at the end of the day, I said, I don't want to be in manufacturing at all. If I would do something, I would do something in the service industry. So I don't think I've been even considered doing something else. But if I had to relive my life today, if I had to go back, I would love to be a headmaster of a boarding school in India.

I would say working with children, nurturing them, that would be my passion, which I would love to fulfill. If I could relive my life and do something and do an education, I would have done that if I hadn't gotten into manufacturing. But at that point of time, when it did happen, in 1990, when we closed down, we were so bogged down with all clearances for your company to be sort of closed down that one never thought of anything else but something which you were already doing as a hobby.

And then everybody, why don't you take it as a profession? So we never thought about doing something else altogether, which was working so well. I was doing it as a hobby, so why not doing it as a profession

(DJ): And maybe just staying with that alternate pathway? And you've laid out a very specific pathway. Headmaster of a boarding school. What is it about that that appeal to you or appeals to you?

(VD): One of my favorite movies is Goodbye, Mr. Chips. So one of the. It's a classic about a British headmaster and British boarding school and how we nurtured children year after year over like 60 years. And that was always my role model, that one day I would like to nurture children. I got it indirectly. I didn't get it by being in a school.

I got it by maturing children in my profession. And today I have seen my second generation children coming from those children I helped to. They have got married, they have children. Now they're coming back to me. That's a tremendous sense of satisfaction. I've helped generation after generation and what happens in my business if one family comes, all allied families come.

If somebody comes from ICICI, all the other colleagues come from ICICI. So that gives you a tremendous sense of satisfaction and a joy. So when a lot of my friends, when the finance world, they were kings in the finance world, I said, that's not something which I'm passionate about. Let me stick to what my passion is.

My passion is children. My passion is mentoring them. And there was nobody doing it. Think of it when you were in school or college, who was mentoring you? You either had some professor or you had some uncle aunt who would come and tell you, do this, do that, or your father will tell you. So I think I wanted to professionalize it.

So I think the whole business of counseling in this country was more of a mom and pop shop. So I feel I have a little bit of a role in institutionalize it like a legal profession, institutionalize counseling also where people can look forward to coming into the counseling business. A lot of children, friends now, children who have come back or just people from outside come and tell me, can I get into counseling?

You're most welcome. It's enough space for everybody, and I'll be happy to mentor you also, because I think I can only 100, 200, 1000, 3000 whole of India is here for you to counsel. So. Yeah. So I think going back, I think this whole thing about if I had been a headmaster was Goodbye, Mr. Chips, I would say so if you ever have a chance. It's the 1934 movie. Very inspiring. If you want to be working with children, I would say.

(DJ): Say I'd love to. I mean, talking about teachers and students. There's a movie called Dead Poets Society, which of.

(VD): Course one of my favorite, absolutely brilliant.

(DJ): The other movie which impacted me in terms of the journey I'm on, is the same actor, Robin Williams in a movie called Good Will hunting.

(VD): Oh, sir, if you look at this, a poster outside of Good Will Hunting. Oh. Is it? Yes. Okay. Got the DVD lying out here. So whenever somebody comes to me, I said, you want to study maths son? Watch three movies? Watch good will hunting. Watch a beautiful mind. And watch The man who Knew Infinity. Who shall watch and they come back to me after Doshi I watch all the three movies. I would love to do mathematics in college.

(DJ): You're right. So good. Will hunting. The Robin Williams character stayed with me because in a way, and his sort of counterpart is a math professor who is obsessed about his career. Absolutely. While he sort of found his calling and gone on a different path.

(VD): So, so brilliant movie.

(DJ): So anyway.

(VD): When you go out, you watch the poster. I see that actually. It's Goodwill hunting poster.

(DJ): Okay, I was in I am a second year. I think it came out in 1999 or 2000, 1999, I think I'm 1998, and it stayed with me in a way. At that time I didn't realize. But many years later I go back to that being one of the.

(VD): Dead Poets Society is very similar to go to. Goodbye, Mr. Chips. We have a great mentor. You know who can?

(DJ): He's a teacher. I think he's an English teacher.

(VD): English teacher in a boarding school. In prep school in Massachusetts.

(DJ): Correct, correct. Right. I think just maybe picking up on what you said, your branches. Could you talk a little bit about how many people there are? What's the scale of your operation right now?

(VD): You know, I have perhaps followed the Rolex model of business and not the swatch model. A lot of people follow the Swatch model. They want numbers. They want online. I've decided to be very exclusive, not exclusive in choosing my clients, but exclusively in working with limited number of clients but giving them in-depth counselling services. So typically, if I look back, if I start in 2004 to right now, I must have touched about 30,000 students.

(DJ): Wow.

(VD): Okay. Typically, one would meet five six students in a day. It's quite exhaustive. It wasn't for two one and a half to two hours per meetings. It becomes quite exhaustive working for ten hours a day and now it's zoom has become worse, I would say. But anyway, it's very satisfying. So if you if I look back, your question was?

(DJ): I was just saying what's the nature of scale? How many how many people do you have?

(VD): I think I have kept it small. We have a very small team. I have four people which are secretarial staff and I'm a one-man show. I do everything by myself. I'm also like a dinosaur because people laugh at me in my office in the morning. All the emails get printed out. My secretary would come and sit out there. I'll give a shorthand.

She read it out, send the emails out. So I'm so old fashioned that respect. I've stayed away from having a website. I've stayed away from Facebook, stayed away from Instagram. Any of the modern tools because I just believe to be in my own world, happy to be with children. They would as much time as they want with me. So we have stayed small and then like when I go to different countries, I travel to one country every month for one week. Then I set up a point in advance.

(DJ): ohh, it's still when you say there are these geographies, the client facing stuff is you.

(VD): I mean, completely.

(DJ): You are servicing clients in these areas.

(VD): Yeah. So I go to Singapore, I stay there for ten days and I meet all my clients out there. Next month. I have to Dubai. I meet all my clients. I have a partner in Dubai who has office, Otherwise, in Singapore, in London and in New York. I meet the client's 1 to 1 at either a hotel or suite I take up in ten days.

I work there so you don't have offices per say except in Dubai. But I think when you interact with parents all across the world, you get a pulse of the world market with you, and that has helped me tremendously. My journey in India, because you know what's happening around the world and bring that inputs into your counselling service.

And let me tell you, a parent, as a parent, whether you're a parent in Dubai or in Singapore or in London, and not only forget Indian parents, majority of my clients tend to be the Indian diaspora who have a comfort level working with Indian counsellor, sure, but even a lot of clients who are Lebanese, plenty of Lebanese I was going to open office in Beirut.

As a matter of fact, a lot of Middle Eastern clients, lot of Chinese clients. But every parent I've seen is similar for their child. They'll do anything to help their child get into and have a good career path and good and good college. So I don't see any difference between parents. But yes, if I had to, if somebody would ask me which parents are the most aggressive, I would say to bit extent the Chinese mothers, perhaps in the Jewish mothers, followed by the Indian mothers.

Indian mothers don't rank in terms of as aggressive as these Jewish and Chinese, but they are really on the case of their child. So but it's fun. I think you get a very different perspective all over the world waiting different ways. Quite fascinating.

(DJ): Going back to what you said Viral about Rolex versus swatch, how have you thought about that? You know, what gave you the conviction to go the Rolex path and to sort of go the artisanal path? In a way, if I say I mean the other metaphor that I sometimes use, this surgeon being a surgeon versus being building a hospital, you've chosen to be a high class surgeon, a sort of a sort of highly specialized surgeon. How have you thought about that? Was it obvious to you all the time, or have you thought about it differently?

(VD): First and foremost, I think I was very clear after the manufacturing experience. I wanted to control my own destiny. I want to go and ski when I wanted to ski, I want to go and have a holiday whenever a holiday, if I have a large organization that becomes much more challenging to control my own destiny. And I felt doing the artisan route path, Rolex route path, I think you can really give the best service to your clients.

And you know, a lot of people ask me, why do you enjoy children? Why do they enjoy working with you? And one thing I always will tell anybody that unless you treat your client like your own child, you can never give them the best service. And I feel if I have to do that best service, you have the Rolex model with them as much time as they want.

And you see over the year's parents, when they go to a law firm or anywhere else, they pay the highest fees possible. Now in education also, I have seen parents are willing to pay the fees if you are giving them good service. And I said instead of expanding and having so many people, so much staff, then your service goes down.

You know you're just making money on having volumes. That is not my objective at all. And yes, I would agree with you. It's a surgeon's model as opposed to setting up a hospital. That is very enjoyable. A lot of people ask me, why don't you scale up your operation, go online? I said, what is the necessary? I'm 67 today.

I don't think I would like to do that at this age. I rather relish my grandchildren and enjoy that, you know, ten hours of constant effort every day rather than going scaling up and having other headaches which are associated with that. Because I have seen people are scaled up, the quality of service gets lost. Yeah. And that's what I didn't want to do.

I want to maintain. And I think for me, most important, most important ethics, you see over the years. A lot of companies have asked me to get into partnerships. They have asked me to. Some people have asked me bought out also at a private equity fund. I said No.

(DJ): Private Equity Fund?

(VD): They wanted to buy me out and work with them. Ten years with them. But most interested in this whole education business, it's all become a commission business. Tie up with a university in England, they'll give me 10% commission. I try with the boarding school. There will be 10% commission,

(DJ): It comes in the way of objectivity.

(VD): But I have been some SAT. That's what I have avoided. I've just said above board. I said, look here, if you are good, I will recommend you. And that's why I'm not tied up with anybody. I'm not going to do partnerships also. I have not gone into any commission business because end of the day, if you want to give authentic advice, you have to stay independent and independence comes through being, you know, above board in ethics and that people get to know that you are ethical in what you are doing and not giving advice because you are getting a 10% commission from that person. You're giving advice but it is true advice for that child.

(DJ): The other question that comes to mind Viral is staying relevant, right? 22 years. You've seen many shifts, right? In a way that was around the .com boom was happening. Then there have been many other booms. Now we are seeing the AI. Sort of playbook evolving. How have you thought of thought of staying relevant and staying competitive? As if I may say, has the spaces moved from a mom and pop to an industrialized space? How have you sort of kept your edge? What's been your approach?

(VD): I think I've divided into two parts. One relevance is how do you stay relevant in this business? Attending conferences, meeting with admission directors when they come out here. Visiting colleges, visiting schools all across the world, all across the country.

That keeps you abreast on what's happening. That side. The other side, I would say, is of this course meeting a wide range of people all over the country, all over the world. I think A) being relevant because of having offices now in Dubai, London, Singapore, New York, you relevant to the world market around you. Number two, writing articles. Do lot of research for that.

At the end of the day, giving seminars virtually twice a month. I give seminars all across the country to schools, to colleges, to YPO, YEO, Why you all this? You are doing research for that. And also, I would say even being one step ahead of what's happening in the market, I remember when I was when we do college application, we write essays and when students would have come to me, they were quite lost, flummoxed.

How do you write a good essay and what would they do? They would pick up a book from Amazon called 50 Successful Harvard Essays, 50 Successful Yale essays, and they try and emulate that. Now, the American child, the way he writes, the way he thinks very different from our child. So about five years ago, we made anthology of the best essays of students have gone to Ivy League schools, and we nicknamed it 101 essays for Indian Roots, Ivy admits. 101 essays got Indian students into Ivy League and Stanford, and we classify them into eight chapters in different, different types of essays. And that became a bestseller because there was no resource base in India for essays and people when they started reading these essays. Oh my God, I can't believe we can write essays like that.

So yes, being relevant is understanding what the market requires. So if I divide both these parts, just put these parts have helped me to stay relevant. And today a lot of people tell me you don't use AI in your business. As I said, I am relevant, but I'm also a dinosaur because I believe in working in the old fashioned way and I'm happy with it, you know?

Well, you haven't seen one day when you come, I have a habit of writing notes. So when a student comes and meets me, I write everything in handwriting and I give them a 10 page, 12-page note

which they carry with them, and I keep it them for the next four years or eight years to come. And then I have a well, I've been known that when I write something in red at the top, it's a very auspicious thing and that you're going to get admission this school.

So typically people ohh, please try to red pen and tell us where we can get in, you know. So yeah, so I think I have not embraced technology as perhaps one should have, but I don't see the necessity of doing that in my business. Where's the Rolex model. Yes. If I was looking at volumes, technology is very important.

For me, child is important. And typically today anybody comes back to me after 15 years. I can remember which college you went to. What he had done for his college application so much so on a lighter note whenever my students get married and they invite me, what I carry with me is a framed copy of the Common App essay to US colleges and they're so shocked.

Ohh Mr Doshi you kept it with you. I've kept all my student's details with me. So that's when people. How do you remember these things? I said because you deal with limited people, you remember each child specially and that's what makes them so, you know, wonder. Oh my God, how can you do this? So yes, I have not perhaps embraced technology.

That's one lacuna. Perhaps everybody tells me, but I don't see necessary. But yes, today a lot of people, when they come to you for project ideas, they go to ChatGPT and it's very evident. They go on to ChatGPT. But I think just being the way you are, it's worked well for me. It will work well for me in the future also.

(DJ): I think the whole discussion now is moving to the direction of staying human in the age of AI. And I think what you just said about carrying that essay that the person wrote 15 years back and framing it, I think these are such.

(VD): Human touches.

(DJ): And the handwritten note, I think that's where.

(VD): Yeah something which stands you out. I would imagine asking me what makes me relevant. People remember me for that, you know, they carry the folder when they come back to Mr Doshi these are your notes. You told me. Exactly. I'll go and become a chartered accountant. I have become a chartered accountant. You told me I got a rank. I have got a rank also.

That's what makes you happy, isn't it? When somebody comes and tells you that because of you, I am. What I am today It's very gratifying. And. And for me, even, you know, when somebody comes from a family, the child is happy and he recommends the second child to come. I know I've done a good job. You know, that for me is happiness. That for me is excellence in the work that I do. Not getting any awards, anything of that sort. But that's what I would do.

(DJ): It's beautiful actually, even before just a couple of hours before this conversation, I was chatting with my colleague Akash and showing him a handwritten note I had written to somebody and it was somebody, a friend's 25th anniversary, and I wrote a handwritten note just congratulating the couple, and they said, just the fact that you took the time to take a write a handwritten note. It

means so much in a world where people are just using AI to generate stuff. So maybe it's so thoughtful.

If I could move the conversation a little bit to your observations of journeys in a way, you've also had a beautiful window seat to how different journeys have played out. And you also have a longitudinal view because you engage with somebody at a point and in a way you are in touch, I'm curious about what you've observed about some of those things. I think just maybe going back to just the process of decision making, if I may. What have you observed about, you know, how people made these decisions. And if you just plotted the decision making style over the years, what have you observed? What has stayed the same? What has changed? What's causing angst to people now versus what caused angst earlier?

(VD): I think I would answer the question a little differently. I think you should look at India's evolution 30, 40 years ago if you want to plan a career. You didn't have too much of choices, and if you had a choice, also, parents would compartmentalize you, son you do either an engineering, law, CA or medicine, and if you need something else, you couldn't do it.

A) there was opportunities were limited, and B what was the parent looking at in 30, 40 is a security for a child. Over the years what has happened I have seen I remember there's been a it's been a shift, you know, every five, ten years. See a shift happening about 25, 30 years ago I think goal for everybody was to do engineering.

Then about 15, 20 years ago it became finance. Then I've seen about ten years ago became law. Then there's about five, eight, ten years ago it had been computer science and now shifted to AI. I think one thing is very interesting that 30, 40 years ago, the parents who would come to meet me, very few had been educated abroad for them, still wanted them to do conventional degrees.

But now the parents who come to me have studied abroad themselves. So because they have studied abroad, they allowing their children to follow their passion. So my first thing they need child who comes to meet me, I would tell them, where do you want to be in the future? And they will work backwards. I said after the 12th, whatever you do, do what you enjoy.

Eventually you do what you enjoy, you will excel and if you excel, you can go to any top postgraduate degrees afterwards. And I will give them wonderful examples of people who've done what they were passionate about and follow their passion. Now that was never allowed.

And today, also, I noticed my children from urban cities Bangalore, Delhi, Bombay parents who have studied abroad. They are now changing the mind-set of allowing the children to follow their passion. Two reasons one they have got more security. Financial security of course, that's required. And number two, they have realized by doing humanities you can still make a career. But today still my students from third, fourth, fifth, sixth tier cities who come to meet me, they will still not go outside that compartmentalized box of CA, engineering, law or medicine because for them, they are growing one step of the ladder.

So maybe 30 years from now, they will also allow their child to do what they enjoy because they shouldn't have gone abroad. So it's a cyclical thing, I think. I think we have come a long way in our country. But as far as decision making, on what career paths to follow, I don't think too much has changed in that pattern.

The parents still play a very influential role, whether it was 30 years ago or today. Parents and sadly, parents try to fulfill their own ambitions through their children, isn't it? I couldn't get to IIT, so my child has to go to IIT. I couldn't do engineering. My child has to do engineering. And I tell them, you know, Mr. Mrs. So-and-so, your child can't do engineering.

He doesn't have the aptitude. No, no, he will do engineering. We have been told engineering is the best option or computer science is the best option today. So this is when you deal with parents because you do educate them in the best way. I've seen of telling a parent or a student what career path to follow show them role models always in that works like a charm.

When I tell them not many role models, I give them role models from their own school who went and did something, but they enjoyed and what they did. He did this. I didn't realize that so even I can do that. So I think that's become the change in people. Urban cities they have gone one notch above where they are able to allow their children to do what they want.

Still, I would say now that 20, 30 years behind other third or fourth tier cities, but that's a change in India. I don't know. I have seen the last ten years' number of students, for example, going overseas has gone up by 300%. Rising affluence, foreign exchange is freely available, internet has become a level playing field and more international schools.

Are you aware India has a third highest number of IB schools in the world? Number one is US, number two is Canada, number three is India, number four is China. 270 IB schools.

(DJ): Wow.

(VD): Forget that sir we have close to 800 A-level schools. Never existed 20 years ago. This is new India today for you and all these students who go to the international schools

Want to go overseas today? So I think things have changed. So you become much more competitive. So that's why the second third tier cities, which I was telling you earlier about, I think it will take them time to allow their children to follow their passion, decision making is still controlled by their parents, much more so in the second third tier cities, a little less in the first tier cities, I would say like Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore.

They're still now allowing the student for their passion. It's in fun to see them. And I think sometimes I always wonder. I think it's more important to counsel the parent than the child isn't it. Parents need more counseling, then the child, isn't it?

(DJ): And they are harder to change children. I think.

(VD): Children are malleable. You can, you can change.

(DJ): Correct. I think I can totally understand just going back to again that, if I may say, that decision point, you know, one of the people I spoke to who's a neighbour now is a gentleman called Atul Kasbekar. He's a photographer, but he started studying chemical engineering at UDCT. And then he went and at some point he quit that photography and built a career. But one of the things he said stayed with me. He said, I chose chemical engineering because I loved chemistry.

(VD): Absolutely.

(DJ): And within a week I realized chemistry is nothing to do with chemical engineering.

(VD): Correct?

(DJ): Absolutely. And the question I had for you was, what are what are these kinds of, if I may call it, silly mistakes. You see, people make plenty.

(VD): Plenty.

(DJ): So so. What are the few sort of, if I may, themes that emerge for you?

(VD): I think small things, for example economics and usually economics in ISC, CBC, HSC it's all memorizing, rote learning. Then suddenly land up in college, you're like, oh my God, economics is the mathematics degree. It's a maths and stats degree with the garb of economics around it. Mr Doshi I made a big mistake., right? And then the shift into business afterwards, or for example, computer science.

When people think of computer science, they feel ohh Mr Doshi I must do computer science in 11th and 12th to go to computer science. And now I will tell them, you don't understand young men. When you apply to a computer science college, they don't want to see computer science 11th and 10th they want to see maths and physics. They never thought, why do they require maths and physics?

For computer science? I say, look here, they want to see analytical mind, a logical mind which maths and physics can prove to you which computer science can't do for you, as in the day. So these are some very two most important things which come up. And sadly, unfortunately for the last 8-10 years, the be all and the end all is to do computer science.

And what has happened lately. Last two years, 90% of my students in America are not getting internships or getting jobs with computer science. So I always tell people, learn computer science, use computer science, embrace computer science, but think ten times of doing computer science because one AI specialist is replacing eight coders today and people have not understood that yet.

Still, it's a computer science, still the norm, especially in certain parts of India. Like in Andhra Pradesh, every child has to be a computer scientist. It's very amusing. There are certain schools in Hyderabad, fantastic schools, but more than 70% are U.S. citizens. And for everybody that desire to go to do computer science out there. So I think for I think changing mind-set would be to tell the children looking at computer science is not the be all and end all.

I think you have to understand that these things are changing and evolving. Computer science was the name of the game ten years ago, but is no more there and AI will play a significant role in whatever we do. I think the biggest fear of everybody is, well, I replace jobs. I think nobody can answer that.

Yes, it is replacing entry level jobs in consulting, in finance, in the legal field, but it will evolve. I think we will have to embrace AI. So if you look at the NVidia chairman's podcast, he says very clearly a person who wants to be successful in the future, if he can do something in Stem with AI on top of it, will perhaps be the most successful person.

If you don't want to Stem, you will do humanities input AI on top of it. You will also be successful. So I think you need to embrace AI and that will lead to prompt engineering sort of careers evolve and AI will play a very critical role in how we think. But if somebody would ask me whether AI replace things, I said, you can't replace a doctor with AI you can't replace a civil engineer with AI.

But these AI tools will help to become a better civil engineer, a better doctor. And that is a fear. I think parents are very anxious right now. Tell us about the future, I said nobody can deliver the future. But I can tell you one thing that your child learns AI in college and let him embrace it, but then another mistake people make. I only even do AI for four years. You could not do AI for four years.

(DJ): It's on top of something.

(VD): The top of something. That's a degree. That's what people don't understand today. Once they go to college, they talk to other people. They talk to professors, and then they realize AI should be on top of something, not AI by itself. India, we have had this herd mentality. You know, if somebody was manufacturing these LPG cylinders, everybody will start manufacturing and we celebrate.

That guy is doing well. If somebody is doing AI now everybody oh my child has to do and data science. And I said look here, do AI do data science but do it on top of something, not by itself, by itself. And I think then they realize it after four years my child is not getting a job. He doesn't have a skill set with him.

(DJ): The other theme I'm curious about Viral is my conversation with Pramath Sinha who is also on this podcast awhile back. You know, one of the questions I asked him was, you have a perspective on young, young adults because you are actively involved in education and you work with leaders. How do we prepare the leaders of tomorrow and how should people think about educational choices? And his point was, the link between the first degree and careers is getting more and more tenuous. You know, earlier, if you studied sort of medicine, you became a doctor, you studied psychology, you became a therapist. Now, in a way, people are starting somewhere but finishing somewhere else. What's your take on, let's say, the role of the first degree and careers?

(VD): I always say the first degree should be something that you enjoy, and then your skill should come with a second degree. I tell you interesting options. I had people doing a BSc in biochemistry, doing a law degree, getting into patent law. People biochemistry, doing something like public health and going work with Bill Gates Foundation. You have people doing physics and doing a PhD in physics, going into doing hedge funds or doing private equity.

So you have so many pros and combinations. So the times have changed. You're absolutely right. What he said and what you were saying is absolutely true that earlier the first degree controls your career. Not anymore. The second degree will control your career. The secondary will be a skill base. That is why today you look at more and more people are opting for humanities also if they BA Psychology or BA in English, I'm not going to get a job.

But if I do what I enjoyed and I top it with a law degree or MB or a master's, that'll get me a job. I'll give you my own example of my own family. My son went to study biochemistry in America. He graduated in history and German. My wife had a heart attack. You know how Indian mothers. Gujarati Mother. Physics. Chemistry, math.

How did they allow him to do history? I said leave him alone. You know this MBA in finance and master's in public policy. That's what control desire. So you're absolutely right. First degree and second degree are now completely irrelevant. But the secondary should be your skill based profession. First degree should be something that you are passionate about.

(DJ): It's a beautiful distinction actually. I hadn't thought of it. And that sort of clear terms. And second one is what you're saying is in a way, what will give you a job or what what sort of will help you.

(VD): Tomorrow if you do a BSc in physics, you won't get a job easily, except perhaps in the finance will be the top of physics. Are you aware two of our Chief Justice that done physics as an undergraduate degree? So when you give role models more like that to children, they get so excited. Oh my God. He did law and he became chief justice. I said yes. I said, why would you do physics before law? Physics trains your mind to think logically when top level law degree because your analytical logical skills which are so exciting for a legal profession.

(DJ): And that's the other thing I was talking to with my nephew recently. And the discussion was should I do a BBA or should I do something in economics? And at least my sense I might be wrong was that the undergraduate degree should be in something specific foundational, like physics or biochemistry. And at least my view is that it gives you a lens with which you see the world. If the first view itself is sort of a wide lens, I Wonder,

(VD): Yes, and no. Both, I would say I would. I would say it would depend the child's aptitude, isn't it? You may tell him, do economy. If you can't do math, how will you do economics. So I would say dependent child's aptitude. Of course, if he has aptitude to do something which is in Stem or something, obviously that's a good option to train your mind to think analytically and logically.

When people ask me, how did engineering help you? I said, help me indirectly. It's made my mind think logically. When I do all my counselling work, I can analyze and think logically because of engineering degree. I would say again, if you do a broad based degree, it's a much better option because you can discover what you will do at the age of 16, 17, who knows what they want to do. And that is the beautiful part about the American education. Talk to any American kid.

The amount of counseling I've done with American kids, nine out of ten do not know what they want to do, but India seven out of ten know what they wanted because they have to survive and they have to know what they want to do. You didn't need to survive. You can follow your passion. Go to college and discover that you want to Engineering? Do you want to do English? You want to do music? You discover in college that privilege we still don't have in our country. It takes another 30-40 years when India becomes more affluent. Which affluence gives more security? With security gives you allows you to explore what you want to do. You cannot do all these things in a country which is developing.

Remember that. So you could have not have done what America did 50 years ago. We couldn't have done that. We can do it now because we have more affluence. That's why humanities liberal arts is now coming in in fourth. Look at Ashoka, you look at Flame, you look at Ahmedabad university, you look at Nayanta University in Pune, I look at Kriya. Those colleges could not have existed in India 25 years ago. So today, existing because people have understood the value of a Humanities Liberal arts education.

(DJ): Is so true. Even if I go back to my time in IIM Ahmedabad. My favorite course actually was organizational behavior. But I kept telling myself I should be doing. I come from an engineering background, I should do derivatives. So I did options and futures and derivatives and all that. And then 20 years later, I find myself in a OB related field. But you're right. You know, one of my friends was telling me education in India is often seen as a financial asset, not as an exploration. Again, if when you come from middle class.

(VD): You can't explore this all fine to say all that actually you cannot explore unless you are from the upper classes where you have got stability of finance, you can go and explore what you will do for a middle class. Upper middle class still is getting that, you know, earning the bread and butter with the degree that they have, and that will take another 30 or 40 years before that changes.

(DJ): I want to move to a different topic. Like you said, many of us do not know what we are truly passionate about. And even if we know, it's only when you get into a college that you really experience what degrees is or what a certain discipline is. What have you seen about false starts? I'm sure many people start in some direction quickly realize that's not the direction. What's your guidance for people that find themselves? Maybe, you know, drilling the hole in the wrong place, you have to drill the hole somewhere else. What have you observed or people that have done it well and pivoted along the way?

(VD): I think if you divide into two parts, if you look at the India option, obviously it's more difficult out here. You if you want to change also you can't change very easily. So I have seen typically people in engineering institutes pivoting more into finance after the first year or second year for two reasons. One, they find obviously the return on income.

I mean, you can make good money in finance and you've seen seniors doing it. So you people in finance, you realize, oh my God, it's much easier in doing engineering for four years. So they build a degree and they pivot into finance. But now with new age colleges like Ashoka, Kriya, you can you do a foundation program for the first two years of core curriculum and then declare a major so you can discover what you want to do.

So I think pivoting into careers, most people I would say pivot. I think if they have to change is more often in America. In India, the new liberal arts colleges are allowing you to apply for economy in a pivot into history. But most of the students have seen pivoting not so much in college as post-college after the first two years of working somewhere.

Oh my God, this is not my calling. You do something else. So I think pivoting takes place more in the first five years, I would say. Then they find out what they want to do and then stabilize after that. But even I've seen people pivoting after ten years also. After 15 years also, people not found their calling.

And that's where I think the requirement of good counselors, coaches like you who can guide the path they should follow. I think it's a call of the hour today. Today, you're doing executive coaching with senior executives. Today I am doing coaching with my high school and my college students. I think they require and I can touch maybe 1000, 2000, 3000 people every year. There's a whole population lying there who don't know what they want to do.

(DJ): Millions.

(VD): Yeah. So I think pivoting is more I see happening more than the job market than I'm seeing in the at college level. So even if Atul Kasbekar want to do photography had to finish his perhaps his engineering degree and then he went to photography after that. So I think that's what happens, that you wait for your undergrad degree to finish and then pivot into what you want to do afterwards, is it not during your undergraduate degree?

Very difficult to do it out here, possibly with USA, but U.S. is exception. Everybody can't go to USA, but for England, Singapore, India, you still have to pivot after you finish your wait for that four years to finish. But whatever degree you do I always tell students, it will always be of value to you. The way it makes you think, the way it makes you write, speak.

Education is very important and help you in life in whatever you do. So don't worry about the future. And I am a big fan of telling what do we do in life? Be the best in what you do. Money will follow you. Don't chase money. Money will chase you if you are good in what you do.

(DJ): True.

(VD): Everybody comes to me to make money first. So I have a very peculiar. When I do a career, I would draw a graph of income vs number of years. That's okay. Economics MBA straight path economics law one notch higher, economic masters one notch higher. And that excites the students. A lot of people think of converting careers when they come and meet me based on the graph. Sometimes, and especially boys, the money factor becomes very important. It was very amusing. So. So I think if proper guidance is given that pivoting is much less, but guidance is lacking. That is why pivoting takes place.

(DJ): And maybe staying with that Viral, let's say the instance where five years' line, ten years down the line, the person realizes they are climbing the wrong ladder and they want to do something else. Very often people know what they don't want to do, but struggle with figuring out what they should be doing instead. What's what's your guidance for people who are stuck at that point?

(VD): I think by and large, situations like this have come more options of mine upon the finance world, with everybody going to finance the glamor. I'll have a Mercedes car. I'll have a five door, five-bedroom house. I'll be traveling first class everywhere and they realize not what it is, you know, and they get so frustrated because it's a cut throat competition.

And so, my God, I didn't realize it's going to be so cut throat. I will make a pivotal change of something which is more relaxing. It will be marketing, whatever. So I think majority of the changes I have seen have been people from the finance industry.

(DJ): Which is the steepest curve.

(VD): steepest curve and people don't understand. You're playing with sharks out there. You know, the engineers from IIT, the CAs are so sharp that if you're not sharp enough in India, you can be just thrown away and you can very frustrated. So that's why it's very important to do a balance of making money and do what you enjoy.

You know, that's why giving proper guidance, that is where I felt there was a lacuna in India. Nobody was doing that work at a high school level, and that's where I tried to fit in. My profile is to going

abroad is one part, it's an end journey. But that four-year path in high school for your path in college.

Nobody's counseling students today who is counseling. Today person like you can do 5-10 people require 10,000 more counselors in India. But you cannot become a counselor easily, you have to experience yourself. You have to experience with your own children. Then you become a good counselor at the end. So unless you have the experience, how do you tell a child, you can't do this, you can't do that.

They won't even listen to you. So it is a bit of a challenge, but I think proper guidance given in school. That's why I tell people when you're in school or colleges, before you jump into your career path, do some internships during college life in the summer and the Diwali break. Do some job shedding in high school. That will give you a good direction where you want to be in life.

But even after doing that, you make mistakes, of course. But I tell you, nine out of ten mistakes are finance I don't see in any other profession people not being happy. Very interesting. Finance is where the 90% of people are not happy. Because if I make \$100,000, you make 120. How did you make 120? I'm very upset. I didn't get that \$120,000.

(DJ): There's always somebody above you, right?

(VD): Yeah. Nobody's happy in finance. And that's why all these problems have occurred. Because everybody wants to have greed, isn't it? The greed, greed, greed. If this child is doing this videography is so happy with his work, is satisfied with his work. It's so true. He's doing what he enjoys. That's not in finance. Finance did it because you were told to do finance.

And it's so sad when a child comes to me with a parent, he said. You join a hedge fund and a child, I want to join a private equity fund. You don't even know what it means. I've been told my parents I must join that. That's what they achieve. The goal for any parent in India should be joining a hedge fund or a private equity fund for why money is big.

That's what they chasing. They're not chasing careers. They're chasing money that has to be stopped. That has to be parents have to be counseled. And unless they see a hedge fund, they not realize the challenges and hedge funds, they don't realize it.

(DJ): True. And going back to something that you said very early on in terms of how you profile a child, you spoke about psychometrics. You spoke about some of the personality elements apart from the interest the child has. Are there links you see between, let's say, a certain types of personality and certain careers? You know, very often we look at subjects and skills, but we forget about the underlying wiring that a person has towards a certain discipline. Other, let's say markers, you would say for let's say.

(VD): Obviously, if somebody is extremely articulate, fond of world affairs, you would encourage look at law as a career option if you have somebody very strong leadership, had a very interesting person, a degree in business, and I made him do sports management, and then he he's now working in FIFA. Today. He just enjoys football so much that he's following his passion today.

So I think after having the experience which you have had, you can virtually tell where which careers the child will enjoy doing it in. And that's what I try to do in my own small way. Convince a parent and the child who care. I think if you do a business degree followed by digital marketing, I think enjoy thoroughly your personality and your aptitude suits that.

That's where the aptitude test becomes very vital, because sometimes you want to do a career, you don't have the aptitude or you have the aptitude. You have not thought of that career. That's where I become the bridge match board together in the career path. But yes, other traits would help you. You get those very aggressive types. You won't go into a hedge fund about there, So you can make out there people who are very soft, the academic type, you know, you can make out a profile with their demeanour also.

And also, I think the family plays a very key role in influencing, I would say nine out of ten children who come from parents in the finance world, we think of finance only law will think of lot or great extent because of the family influences you. But very interesting if I look at.

Sorry, no, cancel that path, I will just go in the wrong track. But yeah, demeanour attributes do play a key role in guiding a person. And that's why I think today I am doing it for high school kids and college level students. There's a you know, if I ask you tell me some professionals who are helping mid-career switches. There is nobody in India, if I work for five years in finance to switch into,

(DJ): Who do you pass the bet onto?

(VD): you know, who do I go for advice? I go to some senior in my company or some uncle and aunt who's been the profession. If there is a coach for middle level changes, there is tremendous demand. Nobody's even thought of that. And people are so confused and they're willing to pay a good fees for that.

So today, for example, you're doing the senior executive coaching there. But if you go down to middle level ten years' experience, who if I have a ten-year experience working with a particular bank, I want to make a career switch. Who do I go to talk to? Nobody. I talk to some seniors or some people industry who give me some guidance, but they don't understand me.

They don't understand my background. We require a professional to do that. So I think there's a tremendous opportunity that also a lot of people are coming back to me for mid-career counselors. I don't do that, don't have the time, I don't I can't handle it. I need to go into much more depth. But I remember life coaches, for example, are a very new thing in India. So I've had people of switch to life coaching also. They not do they don't do middle management, do senior executives. But I think that's a call of the art today.

(DJ): And I think your point, just like you need to understand the child, you also need to understand the world of opportunity and you need to marry the two.

(VD): How do you understand world of operations without having worked?

(DJ): Exactly?

(VD): I mean, I can do theoretical counseling, but if I don't understand. See, I have been industry myself. I have family members. I've got my son. I've got brother of all industry. You get feedback on it. You're constantly going and getting that feedback and putting in your own mind.

(DJ): Staying relevant and current.

(VD): Current level.

(DJ): Right. Bringing it back to parents. Several you spoke about parents being coached, needing coaching more than the kids. Sometimes in some of these things, what in what ways have you seen parents come in the way of the child making a good choice? You know, one is of course, you spoke about parents living their dreams through the kids, but what are some of the other common kinds of, if I may say unintentional mistakes?

(VD): Example boy's parents won't allow them to do anything in humanities. The boy has to do engineering or has to do computer science, maximum allowing economics. Why is the parents think what will the child do but still at that old fashioned thing still remains in India of, you know, security. So I think parents are coming of age will take a much longer time, I would say, for girls.

They won't allow them to do certain careers because they feel that we're not going to manage afterwards, you know. But I think what I have seen children who come from large industrial houses, when they look at career parts of colleges, they're not as bothered about the brand as much as the education they get, because they know they have a safety net in their own family business.

But children who come from non-industrial houses whose parents have made it big, but, you know, they don't have that much of security. They are looking at a brand. So that's when the parents feed it further. Look at you have to go to a brand, you have to be successful. So that's a mistake parents make. And when you go to a brand, if you're not good enough, you will not survive the brand.

You don't survive the brand. You go one step lower for your postgraduate degree. For me, it's climbing up. You go high school, go to a good college and go to a good postgraduate degree. So over the years I've been telling parents and children eventually in life, it's your postgraduate degree which counts, not your undergraduate degree.

(DJ): Interesting.

(VD): Do what you enjoy it and take a degree. It's your postgraduate degree which will control your life. So one step up, up up. Your ultimate brand should come at a postgraduate degree.

(DJ): Fascinating, fascinating. Actually, till you made it this explicit, I hadn't thought of it as a two-step thing. Very often there's a tendency to see it as a one-step climb. I think the other piece I'm curious about viral is you meet many people who are successful or the parents are successful. They send the children to you for counseling.

I'm also curious about how you know how to keep you know, in a way, it's a personal question, right? How do you keep your children grounded? See, I come from the middle class. Have, you know, I'm fortunate to having gotten where I've gotten now, one of the questions in my mind is, how do I ensure kids have feet on the ground? And, you know. Despite the comforts, are in touch with the reality? What have you observed about of the various thousands of people you've interacted with?

When you look at the children who are sort of grounded, if I use the term, what is it about the parenting that you've noticed which is ensured that.

(VD): I think I would say by and large; children tend to be quite grounded compared to. But yes, with the rising affluence, there has been a certain increase in parents who are highly big achievers, highly affluent. Now they have a chip on their shoulder that, you know, the parents are MDs of private equity funds, so you can see the chip on their shoulder.

So I think by and large, children are grounded in this country, I think we still have our middle class values in majority the people I would say a certain percentage perhaps not, but there is a small percentage. I would say no, I think groundness. I don't think I've had an issue with people being grounded. But one thing I would tell anybody when they come to meet me is when you are, whenever you make a career, one thing I would tell me you should learn humility.

And that is the biggest reason I've seen people following my students who have fallen across favour is because they become arrogant. Brilliance makes American wealth makes them arrogant. And maybe sports only makes them arrogant. And that's what I always say when somebody's parents children come to meet me. Some of them are extremely aggressive because they have rock stars in their school, and they realize after going to college, they're like nobody at the end of the day when they when they go out in life to get jobs, they like everybody else and they find it very difficult to accept that they were rock stars in high school.

They're nobody right now. So I think they do prepare them for a soft landing and make them come to ground. So, you know, a lot of these high flying hedge fund, I'm sorry, hedge fund managers and they come to meet me. They always think, you know, they God's gift to mankind. And oh, I know the Harvard chairman very well.

I know the MIT president very well. I said fair enough. So you have to bring them down to ground level. Look here what you may think you know, but is not the way things work, you know, so you have a certain way of approaching the parents, counseling them also. And I think the children, I think it's important to bring them down to ground level.

So yes, I get 10, 20% were highly aggressive. I think you have to educate them by telling them, look here, don't go this path, be grounded a little bit more. So I think talking to them does make sense. And I think giving role models to them becomes the easiest way. I think today, if I have to see why where I have been successful is giving role model to children for anything they want to do, want to give a role model.

This fellow has done this from your school or he was very aggressive. He fell then okay, I won't do that. So you want to give role models to them? Children learn with role models. That's a big best way to like when you when somebody tells you give an example I'll give a example of a role model, I would say.

(DJ): That's a fascinating it makes it real and it makes it relatable. Fascinating. Just a few questions to wrap up. As we as we approach the end of the conversation, I think we briefly touched upon AI, but given given your vantage point from a mindset perspective, you know, what are the few two three things that you think the young adults of today need to have to be relevant and to thrive in the world of AI?

(VD): Simple. Embrace AI, right? I think world is going to become much more competitive jobs, obviously. Would it be challenging at the entry level position? So obviously you have to work hard, be disciplined.

And I guess excellent what you do. Because if you excellent what you do, jobs do open up for people. But I think AI is too early for us to say how AI is going to impact people. I would not like to opine on that. I don't think anybody knows how A is going to impact, but I would tell anybody that don't fear AI, embrace AI because jobs will be replaced to some extent, but jobs will remain.

Now what he is doing, I cannot replace it. You cannot come and do my whole thing. Of course you can do it, but it won't be as effective as a human, a doctor, engineer, a civil engineer. So AI will be a great tool. We should not fear AI, we should embrace AI. And AI will be very helpful to us to have a better quality of life.

But yes, you have. This fear mongering ohh AI will replace all the jobs. I think that's unfair to say that. I don't think that's going to happen eventually. Remember when the car replaced the bullock carts, or when internet came through or when emails came? Everybody said it will regulation the world is going to change completely. Yeah. Yes, it will be galloping much faster. And but I think this is going to be a great tool for us to have a better quality of life.

(DJ): Lovely. Maybe a quick sort of. What do you call that? Sorry. Rapid fire, sorry I forgot.

(VD): I thought only Karan Johar has rapid fire questions.

(DJ): Just maybe a few questions to wrap up. What gives you joy outside of work?

(VD): Watching Hindi movies at 10 p.m. at INOX every Friday.

(DJ): Oh, wow. Wow. And your favorite, let's say, three favorite movies Hindi movies.

(VD): Oh, wow.

(DJ): Hindi movies. You spoke about English movies.

(VD): Wow. It's hard to just off the cuff. Definitely. One would be Sholay. Old movies. Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam one of my favorites, and the Shahrukh Khan movies. Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge.

(DJ): I got it fascinating. As you think about your journey, any particular decision that you regret?

(VD): I guess if I had not gone to manufacturing, I may not have come into this field. It happened by default, isn't it? So I don't think I will regret anything I've done in life. I think it's been a very happy journey for me. I'm very content and for me, I've not chased money, I have chased happiness, and happiness is when you follow your passion.

(DJ): It's beautiful. I think the piece that I was looking for, which I slipped my mind. Maybe I should mention it. There's a beautiful documentary called Jiro Dreams of Sushi. I don't know if you've seen it. It's about a Japanese chef called Jiro who runs a restaurant sushi making restaurant somewhere in Japan. And at some level, you could argue sushi is like Vada-pava. That's a reasonable. But he sort of made that as a really artisanal Product.

(VD): Artisanal product.

(DJ): And it's the only Michelin star restaurant without some toilets or whatever. Some. And even Barack Obama, when he visited Japan, he made a pit stop at that thing. And he's chosen not to expand and stayed artisanal. And, you know, it's a it's a very happy mindset.

(VD): Yeah, exactly.

(DJ): And there's a whole documentary on his how he thinks about excellence, the pressure to which he cooks, the rice, the size of the sushi, how he seeks the guests. Correct. And the level of nth level of absolute nuance.

(VD): As a matter of fact, we were talking about parents. And I must share with you. And this is something I think it's very important, if any parent has to decide college is to go to, I think one book, which I think has been a brilliant Book.

(DJ): Camera

(VD): It's called Where You Go is Not Who You Will be, it's by Frank Bruni, and he's given case one, IVY success. There have been ten people who went to Michigan State, Ohio State and far better than I will get. So I think it's a very important book, and people understand that which college you go to is not what score what you're going to be.

It's how you go to a college which is a good fit for you and where you'll be happy, whether it be India, whether it be UK or USA. Send your child to a college where you'll be happy, not necessarily because it's a brand.

(DJ): Beautiful. I think you already spoke about humility, but why do question three traits that you believe are markers of long term success, happiness, and fulfillment?

(VD): Discipline. I would definitely say hard work. And enjoying every waking up in the morning, as I'm looking forward to going to work today. Every day I get up in the morning, who am I going to meet today? White child and looking forward to coming to the office. That is the case. You'll always be happy, beautiful, beautiful.

(DJ): And this is the question I ask all the people who are on the podcast. What does the term play to potential mean to you? The podcast is title play to potential. What does the phrase mean to you?

(VD): Play to potential. What would it mean to me? Wow, that's interesting question.

Play to potential would be for me. I'm just thinking aloud what would it be for me. Play to potential would be I don't know what would play to potentially be being happy in what you do, being satisfied, being contented, play to potential would be contented and be happy with what you do. I would say following a passion play to potential of following your passion and being happy and being contented. The contentment is lacking, isn't it? Every time we earn, we always want to. We're never happy with what you do. If you're content with what you do, you'll always be very happy.

(DJ): And it's it's very beautiful, I must say. You know, very often people see contentment and ambition as two different things. But when you are a beautiful case in point to somebody whose

content yet has grown so much over the years and achieved so much, so in a way they're not, contentment does not mean one is not.

(VD): Correct, ambitious.

(DJ): Ambitious, or that one doesn't want to grow. You could be content and.

(VD): That you are content with what you make and what you do. That's contentment. You can be same time, ambitious. Also to basically ambition is always to be that you have helped so many people that when I die, I would love to say that I was able to empower 100,000 people in India to follow their career paths and follow their passion. Beautiful.

(DJ): On that note, thank you so much. The real privilege to spend time with you.

(VD): Thank you again for having me here.

(DJ): Thank you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I hope you found the conversation purposeful. Three things stayed with me in this conversation:

- It is never too late to pivot towards your passion; Who would have thought that somebody who is making super-alloys would build a distinctive career in student counselling
- There is room for artisans in this world. People that focus on becoming great rather than scaling; I was deeply influenced by the book Small Giants by Bo Burlingham which has helped me with my choices over the years; I would urge you to pick it up if this feels like something that might be relevant for you
- Criticality of role models as Viral mentions in the conversation. If Govind Iyer and Gaurav Gupta hadn't mentioned Viral as a role model, perhaps this conversation may not have happened. As an aside, when my book "Play to Potential" got published in November 2024, in one of the chapters where I speak about how we discover our values, I speak tuning into role models – I refer to my role models – David Attenborough who recently celebrated his 100th birthday, Robin Williams character in Goodwill Hunting which is all about pursuing your passion and moving away from the rat race and Alexander Babu, a Software engineer turned comedian who operates at the intersection of humour and music and has a big fan following in Tamil Nadu.

I also loved several elements in the context of the choices Viral has made about going down the Rolex path than the Swatch path!

Couple of messages before we wrap up.

The Play to Potential Podcast is available on Apple, Spotify, YouTube Music and most other platforms. At www.playtopotential.com, we also slice the conversation into smaller nuggets and tag them by themes. For instance, if you are curious about transitions, you could go to the Curated Playlists section and look at how people have Reinvented Themselves at various points or navigate by any other topic that interests you!

At the website, you will also have links to the book I have authored - Play to Potential and the journal – Crafting a full life. Both are about how we can deal with the pulls and pressures of midlife and strive to play to our potential in a holistic sense.

Thank you for listening and bye now!

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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