



Guest

Fourth guest on the Play to Potential Podcast series is Papa CJ. Papa CJ is a world-renowned stand-up comedian. He has won awards for both Asia's and India's Best Stand-up Comedian. Forbes Magazine called him 'the global face of Indian stand-up' and Toastmaster International called him one of the most influential comedians around the world.

He has performed over 2000 shows across five continents. His work has been broadcast on NBC, BBC, Comedy Central, Showtime, MTV, Paramount, The Comedy Channel, ITV and a host of other international networks. He taped a Showtime USA Stand-up Comedy Special with Russell Peters in Amsterdam and in the American TV shows Last Comic Standing, he was adjudged one of the top ten acts from over 3000 contestants across the world.

Papa CJ holds an MBA degree from the University of Oxford and is a former Management Consultant. He frequently works with companies and educational institutions as a motivational speaker and executive coach. He has coached executives from over 50 blue-chip companies all over the world including Nike, Google & UBS in Europe, Deutsche Bank, Accenture & E&Y in USA, Universal Music and BBC in the UK and Unilever and HSBC in Asia.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the fourth conversation of the Play to Potential podcast series. This is Deepak Jayaraman here, the creator and curator of this series of conversations. I have a confession to make upfront. I am a big fan of stand-up as an art form and I have always admired stand-up comedians for their razor-sharp intellect and wit, high levels of empathy to connect with the audiences and superior communication and storytelling skills. With that theme in mind, my guest this time is Papa CJ. Papa CJ is a world-renowned stand-up comedian and he has won awards for both Asia's and India's best stand-up comedian. Forbes Magazine called him the Global Face of Indian Stand-up. Papa CJ holds an MBA degree from University of Oxford and is a former management consultant. Interestingly enough he has coached executives from over 50 blue chip companies such as Google, UBS, Nike, Unilever, BBC and Accenture just to name a few. In our chat, we spoke about how he transitioned from the world of management consulting to being the stand-up comedian that he is today and some of the lessons the corporate world could learn from the world of stand up. Without further ado, over to the conversation.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): For the purpose of listeners, give us a sense of what the show ['Naked'] is about and how it came into being?

Papa CJ (CJ): The thing with 'Naked' is, I almost don't call it a stand-up comedy show because it has so many different elements. It's got theatre, it's got storytelling, it's got poetry, and it's got a little bit of music and dance. But the essence behind the show is, as human beings, we kind of have brick walls that we have built around ourselves, which hide our deepest hopes and fears and desires. Now, in the course of this show, one brick at a time, I remove these walls, exposing myself with all my vulnerabilities, all my pain. And it is terrifying and exhilarating at the same time, because by the end of it, while you are completely naked, you are also completely free. So, that is the essence that lies beneath that show. I think, what really works for that show is, I am using the vehicle of my life to talk about the trials and tribulations of the human experience. So, every single person in that audience, at some point, has felt similar to what I felt or has gone through similar experiences. So, when I'm performing, they don't feel like I'm telling the story of my life, but it's almost like I am telling the story of their lives, and that's where the connection in that show is so strong.

DJ: Is there any context on what's the genesis of this show? Why did you do this?

CJ: What happens is, as an artist, as a performer, you go through different levels of growth and when I say growth, I talk about personal internal growth. I mean, there are some comedians who can perform the same 20 mins for 20 years and have gone on to do that. Today, most corporate shows, whether it's in the country or abroad, I can do them in my sleep. But the second you start getting so comfortable, I think, you start to stagnate. So, for me, this was a show that helped me grow internally as a performer. I had to push myself beyond my comfort zone and, I think, that's kind of where it came from. You've got to consistently ask yourself, what's next? How do I grow further? I mean, the same works for organizations and creativity and innovation. I think, often, organizations are scared to innovate because they don't want to be seen to be failing at things. But the question you have to ask yourself is, if I'm still doing exactly what I'm doing now, 10 years from now or 20 years from now, will I be competitive? Will I be well regarded? And if the answer is no, then you have to experiment. You have to create. And failure is a part of the creative process. You cannot succeed without failure; if you don't fail, you will never succeed.

DJ: I want to rewind the clock. You grew up in India, and then went to Oxford at a pretty young age and then you were working with a reputed consulting firm. Then, a year or two later, stand-up happened. That's a non-trivial transition. Walk us through how that passage of play happened.

CJ: That's a long passage of play you're asking me to walk you through. So, I grew up in a very simple family. My father was a tea planter. He worked for one company for 35 years, eventually went to the head office in Kolkata. Now, as a child of middle-class parents, growing up, what do you do? I mean, we all have this mentality of '*beta, settle ho jao*'. Nobody knows what settle actually means. I think, the basic idea is you do school, you do college, you try and do a post-grad degree, you get married, and you have two children. Then, you're settled. Never in the Indian way of thinking is there ever a concept of a gap year, for example, or a why don't you go out and experiment and discover what it is that you love doing?

So, I followed the traditional path. I finished my schooling from Sana [Lawrence School, Sanawar]. I got into Delhi University. Post that, I took any job I could. I used to walk the streets of Kolkata, trying to convince shops to stock Coca Cola. Then, for six months, I worked with Unilever. Now, the fact is,

India is such a massive country with such a large population, it is so difficult to compete. I think, today, if you want to be a waiter in a five-star hotel, you probably need a post-grad degree. So, a BCom isn't enough. I did the foundation exam for the Chartered Accountancy course. I got an all-India rank, but it was just so dull, I wanted to stab myself.

So, MBA was my way out. I remember studying for the GMAT. In fact, I almost failed second-year college, because in the middle of the second-year exams, there is a friend of mine, who was school captain, Sherwood [College], and we were in Delhi. And I said, 'Listen, let's go play golf,' and he said, 'Where should we go?' I said, 'Let's go to Shimla.' And he said, 'No, we can't go middle of the exams.' I said, 'OK, let's toss a coin.' So, we tossed a coin, I won, went to Shimla, came back, I failed two exams, got exact 40%, half a mark less and I would have to repeat second-year college, and my friend, school captain Sherwood College, failed second year. Then, in my third year, I gave half my papers from second year again. I studied for the GMAT; I worked really hard and somehow got in the Oxford MBA program. Even with the Oxford MBA program, I was going to be the youngest MBA ever because I was 22, and they gave me deferred admission for two years later. I kind of negotiated my way in, because I had got into Manchester Business School and a few others at that point, and I called Oxford and said, listen, you want me, you got to take me now. So, they literally called back three hours later and said, the admission committee has met and we have decided to let you come in this year.

So, went to Oxford. Oxford was a tough year, because I had to take a loan for my MBA program. My dad was a tea planter who started work at 825 rupees a month. I used to look at Starbucks Coffee from outside and could not dream of going in, because I could not imagine paying 2 pounds for a cup of coffee. I did more job applications than my entire course put together. I interviewed with, you name it, whether it's a Goldman Sachs, or McKinsey or L'Oreal, I interviewed with everybody. But most people didn't want to hire a 22-year-old MBA, because I was an MBA, so I wasn't an undergrad, yet I didn't have that work experience. Somehow, I landed a job.

DJ: At the point of admission, what stood out for them to admit a 21-year-old or a 22-year-old?

CJ: My GMAT scores were really high and I was a generally sharp kid. They must have seen something in the application. I have no clue, man. When you get into some place, you think it's easy. If you don't get into it, you think, man, that's a tough place to get into. In fact, I remember, I was applying to Harvard and Stanford as well. And you know how all these essays they have similar questions, 'Where do you see yourself five years from now' and things like that? So, I did a cut and paste job and I sent my entire application to Harvard Business School telling them how I really wanted to go to Stanford. They didn't even bother to reply with a rejection letter. I remember thinking at that time, damn it, 125 dollars!

So, yeah, that happened. Got into a consulting firm in London, started working there. Even that consulting job, for the first three years, I went as a young kid who wanted to change the world. I wanted to learn, I wanted to work hard, I wanted to achieve. But for three years in that firm, I was completely wasted. I spent half my time on the bench. I had six different jobs it was the kind of firm where you could get into different departments, it wasn't pure consulting. And this was the year 2000, so a lot of people were losing jobs, but purely because I was good with people, I kept getting employed in different parts of the company. Then, eventually, I figured out a way to get a sabbatical on 35% pay. In fact, I went to my boss, listen I want to take a year off, and he said, no, you can't take

a year off. So, I spoke to a HR partner who was a friend of mine. I figured out a deal where you could get one year off on 35% pay, went to my boss, sold him the idea, and both of us left the company on a sabbatical.

Now, that was the year when I tried lots of things. I set up some schools for underprivileged kids. I learnt how to fly paragliders. I trekked up to Mount Everest base camp. And I went to the Edinburgh Festival and I saw stand-up comedy for the first time and I just thought, this is amazing. I mean, here's a guy on stage talking rubbish. He's got a drink in one hand, a microphone in the other hand, and he is just having fun, and that's his job. I thought to myself, I'm going to try this. So, three months later, I got up on stage. Did 250 shows in my first 10 months and didn't look back.

DJ: Let's talk about those three months. Again, 90 days is sort of the golden period for leaders to step into organizations or shift careers. Give us a sense of what those 90 days were like. How did you prepare for your first show?

CJ: I think, I just started watching a lot more comedy. And they had a small stand-up comedy course in London. I don't remember actually learning anything there. And I don't think the people on that course actually thought I had any potential, but what happened was you found a bunch of guys, with whom you could struggle together. So, there were 10 of us who really wanted to be comedians, and we would go to the same open mic nights, and we would talk to each other and try and get shows together. So, that camaraderie kind of helped build that platform from which to leap off.

DJ: 250 shows in ten months are like 25 shows a month, which is like a show a night roughly. That's brutal!

CJ: I was the hardest working comedian in the UK. Normally, there are 500 comedians competing for the same gig. I was the kind of guy who'd go anywhere, anytime, for no money. And a lot of shows were outside London. So, for example, I would leave London at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, drive to some city in the UK with a bunch of other comedians, and do a show there. I was nervous. I wouldn't eat, probably couldn't afford food at that point of time. Drive back; get dropped off in the outskirts of London at 2 o'clock in the morning. I would pay the driver my share of petrol; keep in mind, I wasn't getting paid for any of these shows. I would change three different buses to get back home and get home at about 4 o'clock in the morning. I did this every single day for an entire year. At the end of that year, you have no money, no friends, no relationships, and no life, but every single comedy promoter in the country knows your name. That's where you start from.

Why it worked was, I actually had no idea how difficult it was or how low the probability of success was. So, as they say, ignorance is bliss. I just kept my head down and I kept going at it. But even after a year of doing that, I went completely broke. So, I took up a job with a recruitment firm. I used to work in the day and perform at night. But, I think, the important thing to keep in mind is that, often people say, I'll do it as a hobby and I will get a job. I may have been spending eight hours at work and 10 minutes on stage, but in my head, I was doing stand-up comedy and the job was on the side to support me, until I could get to a point where I didn't need to do it anymore.

DJ: What gave you the conviction that stand-up comedy was your calling or sweet spot? The reason I ask is, often, when people are confronted with such a situation there's always a stop-loss point, where you say, 'enough, tried, let's go back to the regular life'. Did you have that point?

CJ: I think the upside is that what you call the regular life; I knew I never wanted to go back to that. It's like having a fire under your backside and something else in front. Even if what's in front isn't motivating you as much, you know that what's behind is something you never want to go back to. There's that old saying which I've always believed, that if you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat. Too many of us sit in that boat and put our foot out and touch the water and then say, oh, I'll take a call. It doesn't work like that. Sometimes, you've got to just jump out. I believe that if you love what you do, you'll get good at it and if you get good at it, the money will come. The problem is, in most artistic fields, that gap between loving it and the money coming is indefinite, and we don't know if it will ever come. So that's the period you have to last out.

For me, I was just passionate about stand-up comedy. I love doing it. There was nothing I would rather be doing. And because I had managed to save up enough to get me through two years, I knew I could go that distance without having to fall back. Also, I had an extremely supportive environment. My parents completely supported me. Now, 10 years later, they tell me, listen, we thought you'd do it as a hobby and stop in six months, but you just kept going on. But at no point did they ever make me feel that maybe I should do something else. So, that was invaluable.

DJ: What were the few things that were unexpected once you started living the life of a stand-up comedian that you hadn't expected when you set out on that path?

CJ: I am not going to be able to give you a good answer to that because I find that I am not the kind of guy who goes into situations with expectations. I find, if you don't have expectations, you're never disappointed. Because the field was so new to me, it was a completely blank slate. I had no clue what I was getting into, but I just knew I was excited and eager to discover whatever it might be. I have always believed it, and you have seen that in the show 'Naked' as well, you have to play the cards that you've been dealt. It's almost an addiction for me; I have the ability to find the positive in every situation. I will always look at the plus side and what can be made of the situation, than look at what didn't work. So, I think, that's an important part of who I am. I'm perfectly comfortable with uncertainty and I will somehow try and find the positive.

DJ: Maybe to reframe the question, if I'm an individual who's at the cusp of getting into stand-up comedy. I come up to you for advice and say, I am thinking of this. What should I be aware of? What am I walking into?

CJ: Well, the first thing I will say is, don't do it, because I don't need the competition. The second thing I will say is, you have to have a really thick skin. As men, if you've ever tried to ask a girl out on a date, for example, we are very bad with rejection. In comedy, you get rejected all the time. Keep in mind, that in our profession, we get feedback every 15 seconds. If they're not laughing, you have to adapt instantly. If you don't have the ability to adapt instantly, there is nothing worse than trying to people make laugh and getting five minutes of silence. So, on the way home, you have to ask yourself, if I'm in the same country, with a similar audience of a similar background, what can I do differently so I don't look like a fool? So, for us, failure is the only way to succeed. You have to put yourself in different situations, you have to keep failing, and that is what makes you grow. So, if you're getting to do stand-up comedy, you have to know that it is a marathon, it is not a sprint. You have to be prepared to constantly fail. I have been doing stand-up comedy for 12 years. I have done 2,000 shows in over 20 countries. Today, I feel I know far less about stand-up comedy than I felt

three months after I started doing it, because now I know how little I know. I mean, the more you do it, the more you realize how much more there is to learn.

DJ: If you had to decode the recipe of a good comedian, what are the three–four traits or characteristics that you would highlight?

CJ: I think, the one thing that is really important is honesty. You have to be able to be honest with your audience but more than anything else you have to be able to be honest with yourself, what I find I admire the most in any comedian is authenticity. You see, we operate in a profession that has no rules, no boundaries, no guidelines, and no social norms that say you can say this or you can't say this. So, for the first time, you are thrown into a space where you have to ask yourself, what I genuinely feel about these things without any social conditioning. And it is an incredible journey of self-discovery. I mean, I call stand-up comedy an outward expression of an inward journey. So, for me, authenticity is critical. If you're trying to be somebody else on stage, the audience will see through that. Finding your voice is a journey. You can't be this person right at the start. When you start performing, you're trying to please everyone. You want the confidence that you can make people laugh. Over the course of time, as you find your own voice, you're just being yourself. I mean, at this point of time, I'm doing it more for myself than for them. If you like it, fine; if you don't like it, also fine, you can leave. Eventually, your audience will find you. The people who don't like your kind of stuff will wean themselves out automatically. So, authenticity, number one.

Number two, vulnerability. An audience wants to see somebody they can relate to. In India, there's a misconception, people start thinking of stand-up comedy or comedians as celebrities. It is the antithesis of celebrity. Because as a celebrity, I can say, hey, you know what it's like when you're getting bored and you buy a car for 100,000 dollars. No, they don't know what it's like. But as a comedian, I can talk about a receding hairline. I can talk about a bad marriage. I can talk about failing at things. And my audience can relate to that. That is very important. One of the biggest compliments I ever got was from a woman who thought she was offending me. She said, 'If you don't mind, can I say something?' I said, 'Yeah, sure!' She said, 'You are like us only.' And I don't think she realized what a big compliment that was. Because it's very important for your audience to be able to feel that you're one of them. That's what makes them go with you.

So, authenticity, vulnerability, and like I said, a really, really thick skin. You have got to be able to go the distance. Also, I think, it's not important to have something different to say but to have a point of view that is unique to you. I never understood this when I was starting out and it's still something that's difficult to do. But if all the jokes you did, all the stories you told on stage, if somebody else picked up and was able to perform them, then it's probably not you. I never understood that when I was starting out and it's something that's still difficult to do. But I can see how that would work with a show like 'Naked'. Nobody else can do that show. And I think, that's important, to have your own individual voice and your persona.

DJ: I think, like in any creative profession, there is always the inside-out versus the outside-in, which is often market driven. So, what I hear you say is, over the long term, the more and more you are inside out...

CJ: See, the outside also matters. I mean you've still got to be professional. You've still got to be funny. You've still got to deliver. You've still got to pay the bills. You've still got to have a brand that you have to build — brand is really important. But 90% of most business is relationships and

networks and your personal brand. A lot of people can do the job, but the question is who that client wants to work with. In consulting, you have the airport test, for example, that if you were to miss a flight and you were stuck in an airport for six hours with that person, could you sit with this person? Often it's that.

DJ: You spoke about marathon versus sprint. As you look at the people that have come into this profession in India, in the West, if you look at the people that fall off the hopper, over the short term, what are the failures? What are the reasons people don't stick the course?

CJ: I'm not sure I would call them failures. It's a very difficult course to stick. Stand-up is not easy to get good at. It is a tough thing to do and you've got to constantly write new material, you've got to constantly reinvent. It's not like it's an admin job. I wouldn't call them failures. It's something you try and maybe you find it's not for you, but there's something else for you. I genuinely believe, as human beings, it is our duty to find something that we love doing because the only way you can be the best in the world at something is if it's something that you love doing. Otherwise, you will never put in the kind of effort that is required to be brilliant at that. I also believe that if you don't do what it is that you're meant to be doing this is a bit philosophical then not only are you depriving yourself of happiness but you are also depriving the world of somebody who was meant to be a painter or a singer or musician or whatever the case might be. It's all about delivering to your potential. There are too many people who are stuck in jobs because they have to pay the bills and they are going there nine to five, hoping to find their potential or happiness outside that job. I understand, you've got to feed the stomach and you have to feed the soul. You have to find a balance, so that you can, somehow, finance feeding your soul. That is the Holy Grail.

DJ: If you had to reflect on your journey and really say what the two–three tips are, you would give to people to play to their potential, are there some underlying principles that stand out from your journey?

CJ: One of the best pieces of advice that I got when I was starting out was, it's very important for you to grow in the dark because the second you hit the limelight, you don't have the freedom to screw up. I find that, nowadays, people are in too much of a hurry to get famous or to get rich or to get opportunities. But if you get an opportunity that is too big for you and you fail, it might be a while before people look at you again. So, for me, what I love doing is, going away back into the dark, experimenting, growing, trying to come up with something new and then coming out to present that. I find, nowadays, people are trying to learn the tricks of the trade before they learn the trade. It's very important for you to focus on your trade, find the passion, get involved in it, and become good at it.

Today, for example, I have comedians who say, what's the secret, how do I get ahead? I tell them, see, if you want to compete as an international comedian, you need one hour of bulletproof good material. Now, a new comedian does five minutes, I tell them, the second you've got five minutes, that's brilliant. You don't have to go to every show and be brilliant for those five minutes. You take those five minutes and you stick them away in a bank. Then, you create another five, then another five, until you've got that bulletproof one hour. Then, you come out and announce yourself to the world. Similarly, with achieving your potential, you have to first focus on realizing that potential before you put yourself in a situation where somebody can push you down and you think, you know what, maybe I don't have what it takes.

DJ: Reflecting on the show 'Naked,' one of the pieces that stand out for me is the notion of vulnerability and the role that it plays in building trust. Gives us a sense of how that's played out in your stand-up and in other aspects of your life?

CJ: You see the problem is that, nowadays, people are trying to be perfect. With social media, every Facebook post is about how my life is amazing. We have become a world where our sense of self-worth comes from external validation. Now, all human beings know that is not the case. People ask me about confidence. Yesterday, I had a friend who asked me, how you have the confidence to go up and talk like that. I think, the second you can understand that it is completely OK for you to fail, there's nothing wrong with failing that is where confidence comes from.

People ask me about presentations, I am nervous about presentations. The second you understand it is completely OK for you to tell your audience, 'I don't know but I can find out and come back to you,' you are fine. Because what you might not realize is that all those other people have the same fears, the same vulnerabilities, and even if you fail, the fact is, they will admire you for having the guts to put yourself out there and talk about things or do things that they didn't dare to do. At the end of the day, we're all human beings, we all have vulnerabilities, we all have pain, and we all have weaknesses. The more human we can be with each other, the more that connection comes. I'm much happier opening up to you about my problems if I know that you have problems too. But if you're this picture of perfection, then I'm like, whoa, maybe I don't want to hang out there and look bad.

I mean, what do I do in 'Naked'? In the show, 'Naked,' I put out all my weaknesses, all my pain. You will be amazed at the kind of stories people have told me afterwards. They have cried. They have opened up about various tragedies they have gone through in their life which they have suffered with for years. Many of them have walked out of the show thinking, if he can go through this and still find the positive, why can't I? That's why when you asked me right at the start, my first answer was honesty. If you can be honest with yourself and then take that honesty to other people, I think, in today's day and age, that is a rare quality and people will want to work with you or want to relate to you for that.

DJ: Talking about the parallels between the stand-up world and the business world, when I look at stand-up as a profession, clearly there's a piece around executive presence, holding your own in front of an audience. There's a piece around storytelling, which clearly has an impact on how you carry an organization with you. There's a piece around humour which is a good life skill, I believe. Give us a sense on how people can cultivate these skills and what are the clues from the stand-up world that can be applied in the business world.

CJ: So, I would rather address the second part of your question, because the first part is pretty obvious, presentation skills, gravitas. I help a lot of C-level executives with speech writing, because as comedians we are mentally trained to cut out the fat. Every single extra word that is not required is removed and we find a way to get to the punch line, whether it's a funny punch line or a business point that you're trying to make. But there is so much that business can learn from stand-up comedy.

Today, as a performer, as Papa CJ, I am a brand. It is a brand that I have to cultivate globally. Now, I deliver a service in say 20 different countries. My brand values, my point of view, my value proposition does not change no matter which country I'm in. My audience might disagree with me,

but I'm not going to change what I stand for. Same with any brand. However, no matter which country I'm in, I've to get that audience to relate to me. Similar for a brand. In a world of 140 characters and limited attention span, how do you, as a brand, grab attention instantly? Comedy can teach you that. What do I do when I go to a new country? I find out about their history, their politics, and their scandals. I read the last 10 days' papers, and I start with information and material that they care about. Similarly, with a brand, if you can talk about what concerns them instantly, you've got their attention. When you can take them beyond their borders, then you can bring them to your side and tell your story, but it's got to be about them first. So, one, grabbing attention.

Secondly, dealing with feedback. We get feedback every 15 seconds. I've already said this, if they are not laughing, you've got to change. How do you adapt instantly to feedback? Today, with social media, as brands, as organizations, you get feedback immediately. Now, for us, we deal differently. We don't have a standard response. Today, you see many of these companies, you send them a tweet, and you'll get an autobot which will send you a standard response. We don't do that as comedians. You may have stock putdown lines, but eventually that doesn't work. If a man heckles me, I have the freedom to destroy him instantly. If a woman heckles me, I have to be gentle until it gets to a point where she is disrupting the show for the rest of the audience. So, for example, I had a very drunk woman heckling me once, in the UK. My first heckle putdown was, I said, oh look, I'm being heckled by a woman with the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. In fact, one eye is so beautiful; the other one can't stop looking at it. So, funny, gentle putdown. Then, the next putdown was, I got 400 people in the audience. I said, do you want her to keep quiet. They said, yes. So, on the count of three, I got 400 people in the audience to shout at one go to tell her to shut up. Next level, I said, ma'am, I would say something mean to you but I'm not going to do that, I'm not allowed to do that, because where I come from, cows are considered sacred. Eventually, I went on to say, I'm sorry, ma'am, I don't know how to deal with you because where I come from; we don't have fat, drunk women with low self-esteem. Now, that's an extremely rude thing to say. It's the kind of thing I would never say, but it's got to the point where the crowd hates her. They are entirely on my side and her husband has practically covered her mouth and put her under the table. Now, the relationship to that is, in your organization, when you're getting 'heckled' by your customers, which customer do you put down? Which customer do you address? Who are you kind to? And what are the different levels of the journey you have to take them down to deal with their query or their problem?

When I go for a show and my mother or my father are there, my father is never watching me. He is watching the audience, to see how they react, how I'm working the crowd. In your organization, who is CJ's dad? Who is Papa CJ's dad who is watching your audience? When my mum comes for a show, after every show, no matter how good it is, the first thing she will do is tell me about the things that I could've done better or that didn't work. I hate it. It drives me mad, but nothing teaches me more or helps me grow more than that feedback. In your organization, who is CJ's mom?

So, these are just some of the small elements that organizations can learn. I mean, today, I see so many start-ups and their communication is terrible. They want how many ever millions of funding, but over three minutes, they cannot even communicate what they do. I mean, come on, how difficult is it? What is your objective? I want funding. This is who I am, this is what we do, this is our team, this is the size of the opportunity for you, and this is our success so far. Bang! Done! That should take you two minutes, with two points under each of those. They just can't seem to do it. They will pitch for two minutes and at the end of it, you're like, but what do you guys do? So, I think,

communication is a skill that comedians are very good at and we can help turn 50 pages of presentation hogwash into five minutes of bulletproof stuff. That is something organizations can learn from us, cutting out the fat.

DJ: That's fascinating. I am told that you need to write an hour's material to get 5–10 minutes' worth to make it bulletproof.

CJ: Yeah. Also, what we do is we market test. I will take new stuff that I've written to 10 small shows, try it out, see what worked, tweak it, before I take it on a big stage. That's another one of the things we do.

DJ: What are the three things that they don't teach you at B-school?

CJ: They don't necessarily teach you empathy. A business school is normally an environment with a whole bunch of A-type people who are very driven. I don't think they teach you how to sit back and smell the roses as they say. And I'm a very big advocate of the offline world. Nowadays, everything is about online, it's Facebook and Twitter. I believe in the art of conversation. I think, it's beautiful to be able to just leave your phone behind, sit with somebody, have a cup of coffee, and just talk. I'm going off track from business school, but I don't think it's all about getting to some destination really quickly. Sometimes, it's nice to take a stroll and take your time to get there, because once you get there, then what? So, I think business school doesn't necessarily teach you to enjoy the journey.

One of the questions I've always asked, especially young people who come to talk to me about careers or things like that, I ask them, if you had a billion dollars in the bank, how would you spend your time differently? Not what would you spend the money on. And, I think, that's an important question to answer. Often, somebody will say, oh I will travel to Europe for a month. When you actually translate it down to what will that actually cost, let's get to the specifics, often, I find that the cost of our dreams is much lower than we think it is our heads. The problem is, we all think, I'm going to work, I'm going to achieve, I'm going to do this, and then I will do this thing that I really want to do. Why? I mean, at the end of it, we're all going to be dead. You're not going to take anything with you. Why don't you just enjoy yourself while you're at it? Why does it have to be an I'm going to reach there, and then I'm going to do that? I mean, there are so many people who, when their lives are hit by some major tragedy whether it's cancer, whether it's an accident, whether it's surviving one of those that changes their perspective and they look at the things that they really value in life. Why should you want to need to wait for something like that to happen to you before you can start appreciating what is important in the world? I think, that is something that business school does not teach you.

DJ: True. That's quite profound and I've noticed, in the long run, as determinants of happiness and fulfillment, some of these hold a greater cue.

CJ: You know, they say that happiness is where three things meet: pleasure, challenge, and meaning. Often, we run for pleasure, challenge tends to get thrown our way one way or the other, but it's that search for meaning. So, if you can find that meaning and build your pleasure and challenge around that, then you might find happiness.

DJ: It's an interesting frame and on that note as you knows this podcast is titled Play to Potential.

CJ: Yeah.

DJ: And this is about people listening to their inner voice.

CJ: Yeah.

DJ: And finding what they are meant to do to use your language. So, in summary, if I had to say for wrapping up what are the one or two things you would like to leave behind for people to play to their potential?

CJ: The only thing I would say is turn your mobile phone off for 48 hours, lock it away somewhere. You will torture yourself; you will feel like hell for the first six hours but after that you might find something that you haven't found in many, many years.

DJ: That's fascinating and that's so profound in so many levels given the technology addicted world we live in, yeah. Thank you, CJ. It's been a pleasure talking to you and to your point I have enjoyed the offline conversation. It's been a wonderful experience. Thanks for your time.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more please visit playtopotential.com or subscribe the podcast on iTunes, Stitcher or one of the other Podcast apps.

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- 04.01 Papa CJ - Why 'Naked'?
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- 04.03 Papa CJ - Plunging into stand-up

- 04.04 Papa CJ - Stand-up: Unknown unknowns
- 04.05 Papa CJ - Stand-Up: What it takes
- 04.06 Papa CJ - Lessons from a journey in stand-up
- 04.07 Papa CJ - Role of vulnerability in building trust
- 04.08 Papa CJ - What corporates could learn from stand-up
- 04.09 Papa CJ - Three things they don't teach you in B-school

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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