Guest

Dheeraj Pandey is Co-Founder, Chairman and CEO of Nutanix, Inc. (Market Cap of ~USD 3.5 Billion) that had an IPO in September 2016. Nutanix is a cloud computing software company that sells what it calls hyper-converged infrastructure appliances and software-defined storage. He grew up in Patna and is an alumnus of IIT Kanpur and UT Austin.

In our conversation, Dheeraj spoke about his early formative years and the rationale behind some of the initial career choices (writing JEE twice, going for a PhD instead of job and subsequently dropping off the PhD programme). He also talks at length about 4As - Ant fragility, Authenticity, Ambition and Attention to Detail that are core to him and the character of Nutanix. He also discusses how he has grown as a leader over time and has scaled up as the organisation has grown over time.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 19th conversation of the Play to Potential Podcast series. I am Deepak Jayaraman - the creator and curator of these conversations. I am an Executive Coach and I work with leaders to help them to be thoughtful about two questions that leaders ask as they navigate through life - where to go and how to grow? I am excited to share that this podcast was recently awarded for Innovation in Digital Publishing (by Digipub World). So thank you for your support. My guest this time is Dheeraj Pandey, Co-founder, Chairman and CEO of Nutanix Inc, a 3.5 Billion dollar cloud computing company that had a successful IPO last year. Going back to one of my earlier podcast conversations with Nandan Nilekani, one of the things he said was about India having a lot of start-ups but fewer scale-ups. I was curious to talk to Dheeraj when he visited Mumbai recently on how he has scaled up the company and his leadership capability as Nutanix has grown to what it is today. Without further ado, over to the conversation.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What are the two three things that got baked in you in your formative years, that still form of core part of who you are and that have helped you in the journey what would you say?

Dheeraj Pandey (DP): There was a part of me that was a little bit stubborn I would probably use the word resolute, when I was four my elder cousins used to call me Atal, Atal is resolute, for probably some reasons that they would be aware of but I think there was a level of resoluteness that actually helped me in later life as well a big part of my Psychic is probably the combination of both my mom and my dad and this is not a clique like when I analyse myself I am like what do I really learn from my parents, one of them which is my mom's resoluteness is deeper, I mean I have seen her go through the adversity of life and what is been to really have go through in English medium school or stay in Patna in a part of the world that was highly corrupt and the government was dysfunctional and my father was a government employee and lots of things that they actually had sacrifice to even have a stay in Patna and go to a good English medium sort of schools, I think there was this resoluteness in her, we have lost a lot, I mean she lost actually everything to have us get educated my brother and I and so on and I think my father had this thing about humility which was very unique about him so my mother's fears resolve and my father's humility is this amazing combination that I have tried to practice throughout life so when I was coming out of my high school I am one of those people who settle ok it's like I have to go to IIT but at least I should have an option, like have an optionality and then sort of figure it out and the fork in the road and so on and I was getting better and better at math and probably fairly good at chemistry and so basically natural science in general I was getting better and better at first I started to realize look maybe that path I would take. Even though in the early years I was like maybe I am not connecting to engineering but the thing that made me sort of choose things in life all was based on this thing that said the worst is not bad enough to take that step if the worst is not bad enough. So you have always thought about the worst case and if the worst was not bad enough the risk will worth it that's the way I took to my early years so I went to IIT in 1992 but I had a rank of 1420 and I realized that to get a brand change I would be lesser probability than I were to quit and go back and take JEE one more time and get CS the probability go higher that way, and the probability was from the inside, I was there for two months, I was there till October and most people like what are you doing? You have a great thing going here and by the way worst case you will get EE and that's a good enough and so on and I said I just haven't tried hard enough, let me just give it a trial because the probability is way better there and I knew that worst case I will just do physics, maybe do St. Stephen and do physics and there still be a path from there or something like that, if the worst is not bad enough then I will just take that so I think I have used at throughout life actually, if the worst is not bad enough then just go do it.

DJ: Going back to your childhood, you come from the humble background but cut to the present given where you are, and let's say if you reflect on your kids growing up how do you think about instilling some of these trades in them given that they grew up in a very different environment in terms of comfort and in terms of what's taken care of? How do you think about that?

DP: Well, there is a sense of nostalgia about how we grew up and I do know that anything that we have today if femoral and it can vanished so there is a sense of some paranoia as well about some of that and I teach them about we have three children the eldest is 7 and we have twin girls who are 3 and a half and these simple things that we teach them and I teach them about always about three things because there's something about three that is powerful. So like couple of that trilogies that I teach them about, one is don't waste food, don't waste water and don't waste energy so like all of sudden they understand that what is the energy and this is energy, you switched the light off before you leave the room and so on the other one is focus, listen, respect so when I drop my son to school I would just say three animal, what those three things need and so on and so forth I think it helps to actually have that sense of paranoia that these things actually so matter.

DJ: How did you think about that fork on the road? When you had to pick between job on India and a Job at Deloitte what was the processing framework at that stage?

DP: This is more like looking at process in some stints, I talk about this in negotiation this is the way I think about the things in life so I was negotiating with my career in some sense and a PhD was a process the Deloitte and the Unilever job was like a substance you actually say that look, I know exactly what I am going to make therefor should I chose this and figure out things every three four years and pick a process that robust and that robust process is the PhD and I like computer science and I in fact developed a very good sense for math as well at IIT or set theory in Algebra, Graph theory, Linier Algebra, operation researches and there is a lot of those things that I also did along with the computer science so I knew that your tool will be a good place for that too if I were to really get into cosy Math, Cosy computer Science too and in some sense I just knew that you build a good foundation and because it was fellowship I thought that it would give me optionality to go and pick what I wanted in the next 18 months so I don't have to pick something right away.

DJ: Processing another fork on the road you subsequently quit your PhD and went to the valley, so how did you process the trade off at that point in time?

DP: So I had interned in the summer of 1998 at Oracle the summer of 1998 if you remember was probably was the height of the bubble, the internet bubble and this was in … in California right in the heart of the silicon valley where everything was booming like it had never before, I mean they had found internet in 1994 or 95 there was obviously the era of Netscape the browser was and things like that just looked like it was a different world all together, it was probably as good as it was when we probably found oil or steam engine or something of that nature actually it was the disruptive so I think it was heady, I mean those days were heady and I was there for three months and I was like you know what timing is everything so why don't I actually take a leave of absence once I go back, so I finished my masters requirements and I said I will come back because right now it's also important to really deal with the industry and learn from the industry as well so I did that for couple of years when I was in new fabs finely it was altered in me having to resign or what are the universities said you can't be doing this forever, so you have to reapply if you really want to do PhD so in the year 2000 I literally drove from Texas to California actually.

And before that software which was the place that was my first job coming out for masters. It was a great place to learn what it means to think about culture and also the fine line between culture and cult you know because sometime the bubble becomes so resonant that all you can think of is the company and what's happening outside.

DJ: When you draw the line it's an interesting distension. How do you think about the distension between culture and cult?

DP: I think cult is very inward focus and actually, culture is like you know how do you actual survive and thrive in the presence of a context to surrounding and non- environment and truly just missing that environment because it was going in spinning out all these companies like car order, Appliance order, college hire, PC order companies like that but a groundedness was missing there was lot of wastage, not enough providence about what does it mean to really build business and have books that you willing to be proud of and go public stuff like that. The company never went public actually it could have if they really grow more provident about the future. So I worked there for year and a half and then I moved to the bay area which is where I started really building more distort systems you know closer to computer science that I have actually learnt for like 6 years.

DJ: Journey at Nutanix, how founders should think about the co-founders? What does it take to make the good relation work?

DP: Obviously there's a relation between the founder but also there is relation between the founders and the company and how the company is paramount because the company is not consistent with not just the founders and their entitlement but also the new people who are joining because the new people who have joined are now the company and which is the founder themselves are so it's a relatively profound sort of I would say combination of relationships which is like between the founders in the company and I think to balance all of that is a very complex sort of system and the one thing I have learned and I have learned this relatively early that nobody is above the company and the more you think like that and the more vulnerable you are the more the company gives back to you, that's how authentic relationships are you don't just keep thinking about kinking from the company because you have founded it very much like parents and children and at some point you have to realize that they have the life of their own as well and they will have their own careers and decision making process and things like that but eventually it's the family that you really care for as oppose to saying, I am your father and I am your mother so therefor it should be in this for.

DJ: Just to understand behaviourally what does it mean in terms of Do's and Don'ts, what do you have in mind when you say entitlement as a founder?

DP: I mean to say that, you believe in yourself is great, I think there's this irrational confidence that you need and self-assuredness that you need because obviously the world is saying don't do it so founders need to be having that irrational confidence but at the same time you now need to also understand what does it mean to do this in the best interest with the company where you are secured, where you give and you get back and I think being authentic where you are honest and you are reducing the level of self-righteousness that you need to have there's a level of self-righteousness you need to even start a company but then as you have this thing becoming more and more real and I have that dust is settling and the companies becoming less nebulous and the market is being explored, you need to reduce the self-righteousness because now the negotiation is beginning with your early employees and with your early customers and so on so now you need to work in the context of people who are willing to give you a chance, the early employee want to give you a chance, the early customer wants to give you a chance so you need to reduce and lessen that amount of self- righteousness and add a little bit of vulnerability where you are willing to say look I think I could be wrong and let me go and learn from my early employee and let me go and learn from my early customers and that's the kind of give and take that you need to start off where the people want to say, look I want to actually deal with this set of founders if its early employee, I am going to deal with this company if you are early customer and so on so there's a lot of people dynamics and you know the psychological piece that's equally important here, they are just the idea itself, everybody has ideas the question is how do you really go and landing it would be in doing business which is the most important thing about doing business which is dealing with people.

DJ: Journey at Nutanix, how founders should think about the co-founders? What does it take to make the good relation work?

DP: So the first one to me is constantly evolving , because the company is supposed to evolve and it starts from this core idea to a business to a competitive landscape, to a constantly changing landscape, if the company need to be that bean that has to evolve how can you do that without the core volume all the time so the most important thing to me is that a constantly evolving core every founder out there seems where I can actually outpace the company revolution because then I am pulling the company forward rather than being pushed by the company, if you are lagging behind you have to push by the company. So that is the core of it now the second one is how do you deal with shocks, can you learn from shocks and can you be better? With shocks in the system, can you learn from mistakes? Which is again going back to constantly evolving sort of individual and of course the other one which you can't early on figure out because a lot of these things are tested overtime is being authentic and authentic is an easy word to say but it's really difficult to practice, one of my best mentors is person by the name of Mike Robins one of the Ted's speaker talks about authenticity he has written books on it and he says it's a formulae, spectrum that goes from dishonest people on the left to honest people in the middle it basically says it's not good enough to be honest so you got to take something out of honesty and add something to honesty to make to make it authentic what you take out is self-righteousness and what we add is vulnerability and *Honesty-Selfrighteousness+vulnerability*, So I go by four A's for myself when I look at a business, when I look at people and I am trying to practice myself to become a better professional and a leader obviously one of them is antifragility like how do you learn from shocks and get better, authenticity, ambition and attention to detail. Ambition, attention to detail go hand in hand, ambition is the optimism and attention to detail is paranoia and together they have to be, because they are the left brain – right brain the schizophrenic sort of mindset that you need to have as founders because you need to be a visionary but at the same time you need to know how to land the vision and landing is about to attention to detail.

DJ: Just going back to your leadership style you spoke about pulling the company forward Than being the bottle neck as one of the prerequisites, as the organization evolves let's say from being hustlers to builders to scalars, how has your leadership style evolved how have you evolved as a person, how have you grown and where have you gone?

DP: One thing that I have observed about myself is that I learn from the life than ever before I have really come to internalize that business and life are not two different things, technology and business are not two different things they are all into weave together actually so I have come to really value context. And when I say context I mean that at the end of the day technology is not an end in itself it's a means to an end business is not an end itself its means to an end eventually they all have to draw parallels from everything that we see around us in life so I am doing more and more of that so we never there's a tough decision to be made, I am looking at what else is out there that looks like this and it doesn't have to be from the industry could be from something completely different and it helps its just this idea of focus listen respect that I talk to my son about, I am trying to figure out are we doing that enough with our customers? Are we doing that enough with our employees and so on, we have this customer centring attitude but employees are also customers in some sense and so on I think I have evolved a lot in this area of really connecting the dots with the life and business and business and technology I have also evolved to be more uncomfortable which means feeling more vulnerable when it comes to tough decisions making because early on if you are a people guy and you are gregarious and so on you like being liked and then you've got to realize that your decision have to go to protect the company as much and because the company is the bunch of people as oppose to just the individuals, the individual relationships that you have than the relationship that you have with the company and if you do a good job of it then all of a sudden you will get comfortable about the realization that you might not be liked but you better of being respected so how do you start to get comfortable with this idea that you draw that like being respected than being liked and there is very fine line between the two actually.

DJ: From a behaviour stand point what's the trade-off there what do you need to start doing differently to move the needle from being liked to being respected?

DP: A lot of it is about decision making a lot of it is about seeing two to three years ahead, a lot of it is about optimising for the whole versus the individual including myself because that's what keeps me vulnerable as well it's not like I am the guy without which the company won't run actually, I have to think about things like sensation planning as if it's a natural state of bean as oppose to something that's uncomfortable I have to think about the company is if it's a living being and think about its goodness and these are things that you never thought about because when you started out it was about you are brilliant, your ideas and sort of endurance and things like that, eventually it's like well I am just helping a living being because there are thousands of families that now depend on this thing and these 3000+ families dependent on Nutanix today so you got to know what the burden of responsibility means and obviously I have become a lot more long term greedy than ever before every year I am becoming more about the long term than before and again it ties back to thinking about the company, what does it mean to be long term greedy than being short term greedy and have this instant gratification sort of,

DJ: Give us an example of the decisions you take to sort of to move the organization in that direction of being long term greedy?

DP: Obviously lot of companies wants to optimize the current quarter and because they believe that the stock will go up if they actually get going job with the current quarter but many times the short term and the long term are odds to each other's as a public company yes we need to do sprints, quarterly sprints, would you need to constantly keep in mind that look thins company is a marathon of sprints and yes wall street cares about sprints but eventually the stake holders in the company who are long term shareholders and employees and customers, they care for the marathon because they are investing for the marathon customers of Nutanix are just not buying things today they are buying the experience for next five years, employees are not just employed you for next 6 months they are investing an experience for the next five years hopefully company defining and a generational wealth building and so on and these are not the short term decisions that they have taken, because what we have done is, we are trying to re-architect computing so it already is a highly disruptive just the definition re-architecture is highly disruptive so the customers that are actually embracing us are forks who are saying I want to look at next four to five years with you because I don't re-architect every year so I think that long term greed is more pervasive in me than ever before.

DJ: What's the signature shift from each of this phases from hustling to building to scaling if you had to really bring it down to one two or three are there distinctive shift that you have made in the way you engage with the living being

DP: So the first thing is that the companies in the company's parks of life there is a great presentation that Mark actually made few years ago at Stanford, he is one of my mentors actually he is the founder and ex CEO of … the software he was on the board for four years and he basically talked about how we need to keep launching new arts of a company for it to be relevant, the cycle of creative disruption which is compressing every five years and its compressing further I think you are scaling and you are building and you are maintaining all at the same time may be three different products, maybe there are three different companies within larger company, because obviously if you are not building five years hence then your current product will be destroyed or destructed because of the competitive landscape around you and I think in that sense that fact that you have multiple product portfolio company now we have to go and watch since you, what you built eight years ago and six years ago but we are also constantly building and scaling maybe two of the products or like we have built an operating system which is a which is a hypervisor four years ago and we are scaling it and then we are building things on top of that, so this is now multi-layered cake and the base of the cake is something that you are maintaining but the top layers of the cake is what you actually building.

DJ: Talk to us little bit about some of the near death experiences in Nutanix and more specifically what do you mean in terms of antifragility in terms of both building that mechanism at individual level but also how do you think about how do you inject antifragility into the culture of an organization?

DP: Going back to drawing parallels, I believe that more things change the more they will make the same This Mike Robbin's Idea of authenticity is highly parallel to Nicholas Taleb's Idea of Anti-fragility because they both talk about the Idea of spectrum on the left of Taleb's spectrum is fragile systems on the middle of Taleb's spectrum is resilient systems which is like honesty, like resilience is not good enough and so if you apply pressure to the system it goes back to the original stage that's not good enough just like honesty is not good enough so both of them apply very similar Principals of shock or vulnerability to make it better Its just amazingly fascinating, there are two seemingly discreet things that have the exact same parallel in terms of the continuum and so on so antifragility and the shocks that Taleb attaches to the to those things is similar to honestly plus vulnerability makes you more authentic which is what, antifragility is so I think learning from shocks, being vulnerable are things that are very closely tied to my psychic now.

DJ: And what is being vulnerable mean from a leadership stand point, what sort of behaviours would you recognize?

DP: In everything that we do as a business has engineers has architect has product managers, we need to have when you write a design doc you need to have something that says and these are the things that you have not and these are the things that you have not considered and by the way these are the things that does not addressed, in a product requirement documents we talk about trade-offs, what kind of things it does, and all of sudden its more authentic when you actually talk about the fact that we have not considered these things you are reducing friction, when you do press releases you don't talk about industry, I hate the word industry leader, I hate the word industry leader self-proclaimed monikers like industry leaders and that's what people just trying to be something and you have not achieved anything and along the way we should talk about how we could still fail and when you say that all of a sudden the audience lowers the god this is believable because its human to be vulnerable actually, you do the same things in board meetings, how do you actually go there and not try to be this super human with the mantle of perfection around you that's highly impregnable business professional that is basically running perfect show and so on, it said if you look at your board members as human beings and as people you can learn from and they are willing to help you with some of the things, all of sudden it is a much better board environment than if you look at them as people who are over seeing you or something.

DJ: On culture how do you think about injecting antifragility into your culture at Nutanix? How have you gone about doing that?

DP: If you think about B to B and again similar to B to C as well customer success is everything and technology is a never perfect product and I look around and look at what really is common about the best brands in the world its customer service, you look at the best plans in the world it could be completely dispute and decrease but the one thing they have in common is loyalty from the customer which comes because of customer service, it's the Human – Human thing that actually connects, businesses to people, and I was listening to Deepak Chopra three years ago and he said look the richest people in the world they don't buy things they buy experiences so how do you deliver that experience during the lows, roguishly technology has failed, so if you go and make it memorable to this idea that you are apologetic, you are vulnerable and yet you will improve the situation, that's what people remember, you don't remember the fact that your product failed, what they remember is how you came together to really make it better and make their overall experience, these are war stories that humans wants to remember, same thing with the software, we talk about self-healing, at the core of machine learning and AI is that man does less and machine does more and so what does it mean for machine to do more, machine learns from the other machine about its inherent vulnerability and it tries to improve by recovering on its own and stuff like that, like we run software and commodity hardware, the word commodity is highly vulnerable cause commodity hardware fails a lot so how does software recovers from that and even the state of being says look its ok for hardware to fail I will go and make it better I will be able to before I alert the human I know what it means exactly for the software to recover and selfheal and so on I think they are all very important parts of the design or of the next generation systems where a man does less and less and the man machine interface is not crossed as often as we used to in the past human do as little as possible but machines can do more because machines are antifragility.

DJ: How should people think about education and careers for the engineer that's coming out of an IIT or another engineering college, If you want to sort of distil that back to the point of choice, whether it's an educational choice or career choice, how would you think about that?

DP: I will connect it back to life and computer science both together because when I say computer science I mean software more than anything else obviously machine is doing everything now increasingly doing a lot more and I look at this between man and machine if you look at these three relationships between these two things is a man to man relationship and when I say man I mean human being, so there's a man to man relationship, there's a man to machine relationship and the machine to machine relationship so coming out of the college, I would, if I were to come out of the college right now I would say do I understand the three things very well? The man machine interface is about design like it's all about reducing friction and the boundary of man and machine it's about user experience but user interface, it's about there's a very popular principal called MAYA principal which says Most Advance Yet Acceptable like Google glasses was not and therefore it failed because society didn't accept somebody actually wearing glasses that could record a conversation without you getting know, so man machine interface is really important for anybody to start a business Machine-Machine is about APIs how does components of the software talks to other components at arm's length with advertiser, APIs, SLAs and interfaces that are well understood it's really important for people to know what do we even mean by APIs actually, where machine is talking to machine and we need to have clear separation of a concerns and responsibilities and advertised SLAs and the responsibilities and the last one is Human beings and Human beings so all these have to reduce friction is at the core of our career is reducing the friction, If you say am I really good at reducing friction between these three interfaces I think you will be one of the most amazing professionals that the industry is actually seeing you constantly think about the Man Machine interface how do I reduce friction how do I make sure that we have designed it the best with the one click paradigms and thinking about the consumer as oppose to and thinking about the power user and so on Machine interface, how do you reduce the friction between the two compounds of software and then Man interface, am I good enough to deal with people and conflicts and what does it means for me to have authentic relationships and things like that I think it's an easy way to remember if you are conducting as well every day and are you constantly evolving in the world of design in the world of APIs and in the world of people actually respecting if who you are.

DJ: How one should think about Diversity of choices?

DP: There is a wall street journal article that came last week about Leonardo da Vinci and the whole thing about him was that he didn't box himself into any one thing and the best companies in the world and the and the best people in the world are nondescript, you can't put them in a class, like when Steve Jobs you would come and talk about, look who's apple? Apple is at the boundary of Arts and Technology and that's what makes Apple – Apple and that's what makes a professionals special that they are learning about everything, they learn about arts, they learn about science, they learn about computer science, they learn about design, they learn about humans and they bring it all together into what business should, I think those are the most successful people in the world and the most successful businesses in the world I mean think of Amazon, it was selling books to selling everything in the world now selling computing they did not walks themselves into saying that hey we are only a book selling company and our only goal is to go and disrupt mounts and global, I think all decade for the operating system had two or three levers convenience and ubiquity and simplicity saying look if we can make these things work across anything and price obviously, they said we can make this across any walk of life we become a joint company, so I would actually say that if people coming out of college they should not try to box themselves from different walks of life and bring it altogether into one.

DJ: The notion of bringing a leader or CEO from the outside as the organization scales up at some stage founders and co-founders need to be honest to themselves on the should I lead versus should I get somebody to lead, how have you thought about that decision?

DP: Its going back to what I said about constant revolution that if I as a business professional, as an individual if am not evolving faster in the company then the company is slowing down because of me and how do you build an objective view of that, I think people around you will tell you and obviously there's KPIs on objectives and que results that actually will show but I think a lot of it will come from people around you as well and living on the high on its own merits and sort of there's something special about it as oppose to living when things are actually going down and knowing that, when you talk about succession planning and things like that those are so important I mean talk about fall tolerance with the system and then when you deal with building software you are always thinking about fall tolerance and it's so important thing about fall tolerance even in this world of business as well and many businesses have not done a good job of and if you look at venture capital firms in the US many of them shrivelled after the first generation one of the most successful generation actually tried to pass that because they held it for too long it has happened in company if you look at, company that would there in the last 30 years in 90 itself they just they had just kept the bottom with themselves for too long and by the way it's actually not that easy to make those calls but you need to think about it every day that how you actually protecting the company what kind of people are you bringing in, when one of the problems with succession planning is that potential success don't have patience, they were like look at getting another job outside and it's so special in the valley so it is not an easy problem to solve but again I draw parallels from the things that I have seen but not on past flow, and keeping it to back of my mind right now, you need to worried about these things because the company is paramount and honestly it actually serves my family will as well because there's something going to happen to me or at least I would leave something that is more robust behind than if I were to be selfish about just my own egos.

DJ: What's been your experiences on getting the transitions right? What do you do or what do you not do to ensure that people at very senior level come in and flourish in a company like Nutanix.

DP: In the interview process first of all you hire slowly and you fire fast as oppose to be the other way where you hire fast and you fire slowly I think it is the biggest contagion of any company when you hire fast and you fire slowly. Which means you need to understand the operating system of the individual not just their resume and their numbers because any one can talk about their past performance by their numbers you don't know how many people were involve in that actually, In everybody has an operating system every business has an operating system every individual has an operating system, every Machine has operating system. So I think you need to understand the operating system of individuals and if you think that they are authentic people that they are ambitious, they have an attention to detail they look like they are antifragility, they have learnt from mistakes and so on then you hire them and then in the first six months you need to be as authentic through the whole sort of shift as well because, you need to be vulnerable you need to know that your ideas are not everything you need to be in some new idea to be infused in their as well and you trust obviously you also verify eventually because that's the attention to detail that you need but you have to trust and it's a process of negotiation it's a process for first six months, I mean I have not gone through bringing in a CEO but when we bring in new individuals, executives and so on we have to actually be in this process of negotiation where you have to have empathy you need to understand what is it that they are trying to do are they focusing on some stints of the process and not the what and the how, you know the why like why did you bring them in and you look at the what which is their ideas, but the question is how is it that they are thinking about going and implementing these things is it about mass change to the existing team or they at least willing to figure out the process behind knowing the team first, do they want to go and understand the team and there is a bell curve of people in the team and how do you retain the best and how do you coach the once who is at the peak of the bell and then you can get to the once that are actually not being able to cut it but there's a process behind that so are the new leaders willing to go through that process itself?

DJ: How do you sensitise a new leader to the operating system of the company?

DP: Culture has to be constantly evolving as well, because the culture is the function of insiders and outsiders and if you are saying you can't bring in new insiders then you are already dead and obviously culture is the function of the competitive landscape their micro environment in which you operate, the context matters actually. So culture is not a constant ideally it should be a few things that is the core strength of character of a company and it could be things like either four A that I talk about, where your Ambitious, we have an attention to detail and we are authentic and we are antifragility but everything else is off for grabs everything else is up for grabs actually whatever is not covered and it could be any three four letter for any company which are fundamental, you can't say ohh we will have company that doesn't have ambition, we will have a company which has huge ambition but no attention to detail so if you keep that constant everything else should and can change and must change because the world around you is constantly evolving and changing so I think if new people come in and they have ideas that are equally ambitious and you more they will operate with an attention to detail and the fact that they look like an authentic idea and you know that you are not betting your firm if their shocks in the system this idea can evolve and you can navigate through the changed based on the feedback from the market and so on you have to give these new things a try goes back to the point about if the worst is not bad enough you will navigate actually so to me the moment somebody says this is not what the culture and the company an like in what are you talking about the core principals in which you operate? Which is the character or you're talking about the culture that needs to constantly evolve?

DJ: One of the things I have heard you mention in a different conversation was about starting a family and initially sort of thinking about focusing on entrepreneurship but later realizing that becoming a father has made you a better entrepreneur, talk to us a little bit about what's behind that?

DP: As I mentioned before as I evolved I realised that I have weaved in life and business together and it's not like this two streams they don't mix I have to weave them together Learn from life apply to business learn from business apply to life like the idea of waste and delight these are things that I initially learnt in life but we are applying it to the business but I then take these ideas because I am trying a room remind everybody about the waste, you really have to worry about the waste as much as delighting your customer or employee you have to worry about the waste and if you do a really good job at the waste over waste that's delightful to wall street it's not delight of all cost it's also figuring out the waste, but then you take those ideas to your children because they are constantly repeating the word waste to take it back to children saying waste. So celebrate eliminating waste even at home because now they will be grounded if they think about do not waste energy, do not waste water, do not waste food I think their learning are to become better individuals just based on whatever I am repeating every day at work actually so you try to just hop around the two experiences in this belt and do on.

DJ: How do you think about success and how has that evolved over time given where you are today what would success look like?

DP: At this point if you would ask me it is also constantly evolving definition of success, it is about building a tone more milliners in the company and a lot of CEOs, if we can do that and by the way that's the hard part actually, it only happens if you build a long lasting operating system which is solving the needs of the machine and the side of customers but it's also serving the individually works for Nutanix because along the way they will build their own operating system and they finished and improved then operated the operating system of the business itself so if you can build a lot of entrepreneurs and a lot of generational wealth's` for these employees that we actually have.

DJ: How do you think about Leadership development in a hyper charged growing company, How do you think about the elements of leadership development both at your level but also in terms of building the next generation of leaders within Nutanix?

DP: I think a lot of it is saying that my fundamental toolset is three four five words it can be ten words or twenty words or whatever. So, The fundamental tool set is three or four words and I have tried to make them like four A's, the question is how do you, when you are in the heat of the moment how do you remind yourself all these three four words will you need a reminder you need somebody knock on the door and say look you need to go back to the basic principles of decision making, of leadership of whatever it is so breathing helps a lot just learning to breath, helps you remember those four words and there is nothing without fundamental than breathing in life so all of sudden those four words are back to one option Breath. Even in the room when you have a heated discussion going on, an animated discussion about strategy and arguments and this and that what is the one thing and obviously am not very good at it but I am trying to get better at it every day 'Breath'. And there is physiological reasons attached to this by the way because the more oxygen goes into your brain the more you are actually thinking better and there's all sorts of sign uses and electrical signals that are through the passage for you will be able to more intelligent, more patient, more authentic in your thinking and so on and so forth at the core of leadership development you would asks me one word its Breathing.

DJ: In Conclusion, Where to go and how to grow, what's your take on these two questions in the context of people playing to their potential?

DP: Obviously businesses need to know what they are really good at and ideally they should be good at both things actually all three of these they should be really good at the Man Machine boundary which is convenience, simplicity, how do consumers deal with your prompt how simple it is to use and how forgiving it is, is it dump proof and so on, so you have to be really good at that obviously you have to be good at how do I really scale my operating system if I didn't have componentise view of it and if I didn't have APIs and things like that what are the SLS good departments and between two pits at team how do you break down your big businesses into smaller stuff that's more manageable and finally do you have culture where people are not constantly fighting which is to Man and human to human relationship form, I think at the core you need to know which ones the either you are good at because someone like oracle has great product but the sales motion sucks. When we go and talk to customers there's a very different kind of arrogance that people look at per se. I mean I like your products but I don't like the way you interact with me actually so as long as you know what you are good at and probably they can get a pass because that's so sticky a product, I was like they don't have too many options it's hard to go away from it and so on, they have built some amazing machine to machine API its basically that make the full thing damn horror to actually approved and so on so you need to know what your strengths are and play it on your strengths actually.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the conversation purposeful. If I reflect on the conversation and say what were the big takeaways for me, I would say, 3 things struck me the most in this chat

a) Having a clear understanding of risk and reward at various junctures and playing with real options as we navigate various forks in the road. It was great to hear Dheeraj about his taking JEE twice and how he went on a sabbatical and tested out the next opportunity

b) Around self-awareness and clarity around what is unique to you; what drives you and what is core to you. It is critical both from a development stand point but also from a shaping the core character of the company stand point as you set out on your own

c) Notion of inter-connectedness across the various domains of life. I couldn't agree more about how one can look at various dimensions in harmony than in discrete buckets.

Thank you for listening. If you find this content purposeful, do take a breather as Dheeraj suggests and leave a review on iTunes and share it with people you think will benefit from this. Look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversations of the Play to Potential Podcast

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Work and Life: Leaders talk about how they think of work and life and manage to juggle the two. No universal answer here but a glimpse into how different people have framed this in their heads and have dealt with it. We all need to find what works for us individually. You can access the playlist here.

In Summary – Playing to potential: This playlist captures the essence of what the speaker is trying to say in their conversation. In a way, it captures the key principles with which they have approached life which has brought them to where they are today. They share their perspectives on the mindset we need to adopt as we navigate through life. You can access the playlist here.

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Dheeraj Pandey - Nuggets

- 19.00 Dheeraj Pandey - The Full Conversation
- 19.01 Dheeraj Pandey - Early formative years (including retaking JEE)
- 19.02 Dheeraj Pandey - Building optionality during early career
- 19.03 Dheeraj Pandey - Relationship between Co-founders and Company
- 19.04 Dheeraj Pandey - Evolving as a leader with the company
- 19.05 Dheeraj Pandey - Building an anti-fragile culture
- 19.06 Dheeraj Pandey - Perspectives around career choice
- 19.07 Dheeraj Pandey - Hiring senior leaders into Nutanix
- 19.08 Dheeraj Pandey – Work,life and success
- 19.09 Dheeraj Pandey - Leadership Development in a turbo-charged environment
- 19.10 Dheeraj Pandey - In Summary - Playing to Potential

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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