



Guest

Baijayant Jay Panda is currently serving in his 4th term in the Parliament of India. He was elected to his second term (2014-2019) in the Lok Sabha from the Kendrapara constituency, Odisha. He graduated from the Michigan Technological University and, with a background in Engineering and Management, worked in the world of Business before joining politics. Jay Panda had helped to form the erstwhile Young Parliamentarians Forum (YPF) and was its Convener. He has also been associated with the India-USA Forum of Parliamentarians from its founding in 2001 and is currently its Chairman. He was awarded the “Bharat Asmita National Award” for best parliamentary practices by the Honourable Chief Justice of India in 2008.

In our conversation, Jay spoke about what it takes to build a career in politics and specifically addresses the notion of resilience in a political context. He also talks about how politicians need to think about staying relevant over time in a digital world. He goes on to share his perspectives on how he priorities and marries the short-term and the long-term in the choices he makes. He talks about the notion of influencing and how the world of business could learn from politics on how distinctive leaders take advantage of fleeting windows of opportunity.

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Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 5th conversation in 2018 and the 26th conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. A series of reflective conversations with accomplished individuals across various fields on three broad themes – Leadership, Transitions and Careers. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman. I am an Executive Coach and I work with leaders and organizations play to their potential by engaging with them during periods of high stakes transition personal and organizational. You could visit transitioninsight.com for more details.

If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to YouTube and type “PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017”. I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. From people such as Amish Tripathi, Zia Mody, Nandan Nilekani, Viswanathan Anand, Vijay Amritraj, Avnish Bajaj, Vinita Bali and the like.

My guest this time is Jay Panda, who is an Indian Politician and currently serving as a member of the Lok Sabha and is elected from the Kendrapara constituency in Odisha. He is currently serving his 4th term as a Member of Parliament and was a member of Rajya Sabha between 2000 and 2009. Jay is a

graduate of Michigan Technological University and was involved in the World of business for several years before he joined Politics.

In our conversation, we spoke about how people should think about politics as a career, what are the intrinsic traits or characteristics people should have to succeed, how he thinks about staying relevant over time with the advent of technology, what the world of business leadership can learn from politics and more. Without further ado, over to the conversation with Jay Panda.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Transition into politics, you were running a family business before your move to politics, so talk to us a little bit about how should people evaluate politics as a career option as against the other means of driving impact?

Baijayant Jay Panda (JP): Politics is certainly one of the most important platform for bringing about change, it has a grip over the levers of policy making unlike any other career, but that doesn't mean it's the only way there are people who have made immense changes for the good of society by being in business by being in technology, by being in a social activism and many other fields but clearly politics has a very direct role to play in bringing about change now having said that I believe our politics both gets too much of a bad name and also by people looking it as a career not enough analysis and scrutiny of how it can or cannot be a career option so in the sense that it gets too much of a bad name it's because we hear so many scandals, such misbehaviour by people in the politics and a lot of that is true, but much of that my experience is systemic we have inherited a system although it is a real democracy we have real elections but many aspects of true democracy have not yet evolved because we simply copy it the pre-independence British Raj system of parliament and governance, which does not have the same numbers of cheques in balances that most of the democracies have, so this is one of my passions I have been arguing for these reforms to happen so that we have more cheques and balances, we have more transparency in politics but when people evaluating politics as a career some people see in it glamour, some people see in it power sadly some see in it as a way of earning, so you have to be clear where you are coming from and if you are interested in genuinely changing society politics can be a wonderful platform to do that as long as you evaluate it what's and all you just don't see it through rose tinted glasses you have to see both the tremendous opportunity for doing good as well as all the pitfalls and the short comings of the system before making that plunge.

DJ: More specifically what are the question people should ask before taking the plunge, specifically around the pitfalls? What's the process of reflection and an enquiry that an individual should go through before they say may be this is the place where I could have a career?

JP: Let's keep in mind that most politicians in our democracy even today either come into politics through family connections or through student politics, from college days many people are involved in politics demonstrations, strikes, college elections and they get into adult politics through that means, now I presume you are talking about somebody who is not coming from that background but somebody who may be a professional or maybe simply a concerned citizen, somebody who wants to bring about change the single biggest things I would point out is to have clarity on how you are going to fund yourself now I have been fortunate that I had a career which or I had a family background which enabled me to get into the politics without having to rely on politics to make a living, now if you are going to rely on politics to make a living then you have to look at the landscape and realize

that one of the biggest short comings in our democracy is that political funding is not transparent now I mentioned to you about my passion for reform and I have written extensively about this aspect about how we can and how we must reform political funding because unless that is done politics will never be able to attract the truly decent people and that remains the problem I would very much encourage professionals especially who have a ensured or assured their livelihood separately from politics to consider politics as an option because then you don't have to dirty your fingers or get into the not transparent world of political funding, so this is a crucial question and this sort of eliminates a lot of viable people because young professionals obviously would not have yet established their financial securities so one of the aspects I have argued for is state funding, matching funds and also an emphasis on focus on legitimacy and tax paid nature of political funds so this is not the forum to go into details of my proposals for political funding reform but if some of those reforms were in a fact to take place over the medium term then it would be even possible for younger professionals, who don't yet have full financial security for the rest of their lives to get into politics and that's why I am such a big advocate of that.

DJ: But let's say for a minute an individual has crossed that financial hurdle and that's taken care of what are the additional mental stage gates that people should have for them to say may be I could be relevant here?

JP: Well there are many I only pointed out the financial security aspect because it is the single biggest hurdle to getting good talented well intension citizens into politics now people coming in from other background into politics also need to understand that it can be quite different universe altogether it can be sometime Alison Wonderland because the normal logic that works in the corporate world in the instance doesn't work in the politics and politics is about popularity not necessarily about the logic of the certain actions, politics is about getting the maximum number of people to vote for you and how you achieve that can sometimes take very different paths than would appear rational to many professionals, another thing I would point out is you need to develop a very thick skin because in politics throwing mud and allegations is part of the daily discourse, so don't be surprised if you are under attack just for saying rational logical things that are in the national interest, people will attribute motives to you even if you have none.

DJ: Why people fail when they come into the politics, which elements of politics do they not get?

JP: I think the element that a lot of people don't get is that politics doesn't work on the same rational as it might in the professional setting if you are coming from a business world despite you internal corporate politics, despite ego hassles, despite strategies working or not working everybody has shared a goal of some kind and in politics that's not necessarily the case you would imagine that politicians across the spectrum have a shared goal that whatever is for the national good we should accept but that's not politics whereas in those company, although companies also have short comings of course but the shareholder's interest drives the rationale of the company so whatever is going to yield to companies success we will largely have the strong role to play in decision making, in politics the very same ideas that you may have championed in government you will find the same people opposing those ideas when they are in opposition not because somehow it become bad for the country but because they wanted it happen to their watch that somebody else doesn't get the credit and the opposite also happens, people who have opposed ideas when they were in the opposition when they come to government suddenly takes the position that it is good for the country and they should go ahead into it, so this kind of logic doesn't really prevail in many professional settings.

DJ : And if you translate that to sort of the traits and characteristics of people to succeed, if you look at intrinsic traits and characteristics, what are the kind of traits and characteristics people should look for within themselves for them to say maybe I could flourish in that sort of fuzzy context?

JP: So here some things will be common with other professions but some things will not so again let me point out one of the biggest attributes anybody will require in politics is a thick skin in other fields you may not need to have such thicker skin but in politics you do need and another aspect which is different, which is common across professions, including politics and other professions is sheer perseverance you can see examples in politics of people who have been wiped out and have hung in there and later on made a comeback so perseverance is extremely important in politics another thing that is very important is street smartness to be shrewd to understand people to have EQ (Emotional Quotient) to understand what makes people tick now these are some qualities that I also apply in the corporate and other professions so there are some similarities there so as I said there are some similarities and there are some differences, another difference I would like to point out is that although in corporate world you do have colleagues and you do have groups and you have corporate politics but essentially loyalty cannot trump competence beyond the certain point if the corporate chieftain were to only have loyalist and not care about competence it's going to come to grief very quickly whereas in politics competence is often sacrifice in favour of loyalty and that doesn't seem to cost as much in the short term because politics is so much about personalities and so much about branding of an individual or a party that even short term lack of competence down the chain of command may not make a dent, it will make a dent in the long term for sure.

DJ: In professions if there are markers for long term potential, are there markers of long term potential when you at a budding politician are there one or two things you look for, for you to say this person could have an impactful career over the long term?

JP: Yes and No. Many high potential politicians have been failed by circumstances so I would point this out that circumstances have a much greater role to play in politics than they do in other professions in other professions too also circumstances matter but one can adapt to them and change much more than one can in politics so I have seen many have potential politicians because he or she was just failed by circumstances now to overcome that you have seen politicians who are very agile in their stand in what they espouse not strictly on ideology but for what sells for the time being, so let me use this as an example in the world of music if you are a classical musician and you prefer to play you're the kind of music that you always loved, now if that's in fashion you will do very well if the public wants the different kind of music you may be out of it but there are musicians we all know who may have started out in the era of rock and roll and change to more pop kind of music and then changed to rap depending on what public wants and some people are capable of flipping genres or stepping across genres so the really long term "Lambi race ka ghoda" are those who are able to step across genres better than others.

DJ: And genres would be public sentiments?

JP: So the public sentiment can keep changing, today you might be appealing to the youth, tomorrow you may have to appeal to certain subsections of the population depending on the state you are contesting an election in or managing a campaign sometimes you might have to appeal to women's issues and so on and so forth, another aspect is the ability to communicate obviously in politics the ability to communicate is the tremendous asset.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hi – This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. Just a quick comment here. This segment of my conversation with Jay reminds me of an earlier chat with Nandan Nilekani, who was on this podcast earlier. We spoke about his various transitions and how he has re-invented himself across different contexts. He provided some context around why he contested the elections in Bengaluru and why he moved away from politics subsequently.

NN: *“it was an intellectual choice actually to get into politics but my experience was not very happy, and in that sense, I think that was one transition where I step too far in some sense, it was way out of my comfort zone, so after the election campaign and after that I realize that this was not where I want to be, that I didn’t have the leverage, I didn’t have competitive advantage in that area I didn’t think I would be very effective so I realize actually my effectiveness comes from being what I am good at which is a technology lead transformation agent and use my talents and abilities to solve large intractable problems and make that available to anybody who wants to use it, so that was my shift”*

DJ: I guess it is worth reflecting whether your source of energy and distinctive competitive advantage as a professional and align with the traits and attributes that are valued in the field you are getting into.

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If you find the conversation purposeful, do rate and review on iTunes. It will help others discover the podcast and seek value from it. Now, let’s get back to the conversation with Jay.

DJ: Double clicking on one of the things that you have mentioned, Resilience and Perseverance and thick skin what do the bad days look like?

JP: If you are my kind of politician who has got into politics for not the usual reasons, for the different set of reasons then there are quite a few bad days because you see the system operating the way it always does disruptions in parliament people looking for short term gain which may not be in the national interest, you can take them as demoralizing but if you have resolute approach to going through thick and thin so you look for the good days. On a bad day, so the bad day could be I would be arguing for certain reforms and suddenly I will get attacked for saying the exact same thing because some other party has said the same thing so for example I have been arguing for reforming the Rajya Sabha for a decade suddenly this government has also started arguing for reforming the Rajya Sabha and people at the opposition suddenly start throwing mud at me, that I am collaborating with the government and not recognizing that I have been taking this stand on principal, irrespective of who is in government so bad days can be getting attacked for really no fault of your own and that happens quite a lot. But the good days can be when one of your ideas begins to take hold and then you get acknowledge as being an early promoter of the idea, so for example I had been supporting idea that convicted legislators should lose their position either as an MP or an MLA they should get disqualified if they get convicted now there was tremendous resistance to this idea inside politics, certainly inside parliament there was no consensus that convicted MP should get disqualified but I championed that idea and I did face a lot of heat, but then Supreme court finally ruled on this and it is finally now a law. It is now the law of the land that if you get convicted you immediately lose your position as an MP or an MLA and so many people in public recognized that I had championed this idea earlier, this is a big idea let me give you a small idea. One of the small ideas I had championed and face a lot of flak was that the subsidy in the parliament canteen should be

done away with because on the one hand we were asking for millions of Indian citizens especially in middle class categories to give up on government subsidies such as on cooking gas and asking them to pay market prices for petrol and things like that and at the same time for legislators to get subsidised food was unconscionable but I faced a lot of flak not just by legislators but by many journalist who also avail of this facilities in the parliament canteen but the public support was enormous and ultimately parliament had to make changes and do away with the large component of the subsidy in the parliament canteen, so although I had to face flack I get gratified by the large members of public who had stopped me at Airports and at other places and compliment me for taking certain stand such as that one, so those are the good days.

DJ: I want to go back to the transitions from Rajya Sabha to Lok Sabha how did you think about the two options and how should people think about participating in the Rajya Sabha versus Lok Sabha, what are the trade off?

So my entry into the politics was somewhat accidental not entirely but it was not one big decision, it was a series of decisions, as you know I was in the corporate world and in the 90s I was involved in industry associations and I used to often point out all the ills of the system the red tape the corruption the illogical, irrational inverted taxes at certain places one thing lead to another and I got involved in the founding of the new political party, now this is not the usual way to getting into the politics but it lead to my coming in the Rajya Sabha, even that was not a full fledged entry into politics, it happened over the next few years that I got more and more involved then after a couple of years I served as the leader of my party in the Rajya Sabha handling many other day to day responsibilities and then I realized that if I were to be in fact full time in politics which I had already become then the Lok Sabha was the right place because the Lok Sabha is a direct election you have a direct mandate from the people and in other words it has more street grade if you will and certainly in a parliamentary system the government of the day depends on having a majority in Lok Sabha but not necessarily a majority in the Rajya Sabha so in that sense Lok Sabha is that much more critical to the system so if you are to be in full-fledged politics then of course the Lok Sabha has a slight edge over the Rajya Sabha but that doesn't mean that Rajya Sabha is not important, it is. I had never argued for doing away with the Rajya Sabha only to reform it and similarly being an MLA also is a full-fledged aspect of being in politics so if you had to be in really hard-core full-fledged politics I would strongly advocate getting to the roots of it which is to have a people's mandate but the Rajya Sabha has its own advantages, it frees you up from having to go and spend time with the constituency, I spend at least half the month in the constituency and that has a different aspect to it away from the policy making discussions and decisions and debates at a national level so the Rajya Sabha does have its own advantages.

DJ: It's almost like a 2 by 2 one is sort of Rajya Sabha versus Lok Sabha the other is state versus centre again if you look at the kind of people that end up flourishing in one versus the other are there systematic patterns that emerge?

JP: Yes, but there is an overlap, please recognize that many people who are MPs started out by being MLAs many people who are in national politics started out by being in state politics so there is an overlap but there is the distinction between the two as well obviously at the state level you are mostly grappling with local issues whereas at the national level you required to grapple with national and international issues so there is much more of a scope to be involved in policy making in foreign policy in fiscal policy, health and agricultural policy that doesn't mean that you are totally divorced from the local realities because let me tell you as a Lok Sabha member representing nearly two million people every Lok Sabha constituency in India is a size of a small European country think of every Lok Sabha constituency and yet member of parliament doesn't have anywhere near the kind of authority or power to resolve any of the issues so when we spend time in the constituency the

discussion there is entirely different from the discussion in Delhi in the local constituency voters are not very bothered about what happening with Pakistan and what is happening with China or the fiscal deficit or the income tax rate they are mostly bothered about getting drinking water getting access to hospitals and better schooling and most essentially jobs and things like that. Better Roads, so that's a very different kind of discussion and as a member of parliament one uses whatever authority one has, we don't have executive authority really but we have certain moral authority and certain political clout and use that to try and make those things happen whereas technically we are supposed to be representing legislative issues in parliament but both are equally important.

DJ: How people stay relevant in a profession over decades when you look at politics how do you think about staying relevant as a politician over decades and what have some of the successful politicians have done? And you spoke about the music metaphor but let's expand on that a little bit on how you stay relevant?

JP: So I have asked this question of many senior politician and I think somebody who have been a chief minister many times, has been a cabinet minister many times told me an interesting aspect so his way of staying relevant was to have done so much for his constituency that he wouldn't even have to campaign to win this is a person who won in a particular constituency multiple times and all that hard work that he put in decades ago means that he has a pocket bearer so one method of, this is the key method of remaining relevant is to ensure that you are always in parliament if you are not in parliament then your relevance of course decreases so this is one way to ensure relevance is to create such a situation back home in your constituency that you will always or almost always come back re-elected into parliament and parties can't ignore you so that's one key aspect and I have taken this to heart and tried to follow it myself there are others who have found ways to remain relevant they have catered to niches or subsections of the polity and an appeal to their concerns in a way that larger parties or other politicians have not so they have become champions of certain groups or sub sections of the population and that has kept them relevant there are many other ways of staying relevant, people who are glib and can communicate very well can remain relevant irrespective of changes of leadership irrespective of changes of government. Another way to stay relevant is to be loyal to somebody else who has certain entrenched position and will always be around so that has been a way of staying relevant, there are many different ways.

DJ: In what ways has technology changed the game? Both in terms of staying relevant but also in terms of the various elements of politics, including building a personal brand?

JP: Technology is beginning to have a huge impact, but it has really only started impacting Indian politics in the last decade and especially in the last five years so I am fond of using an example. One of the reasons that we have many dynastic politicians is that if you come from the political family there is a certain branding already associated with you and this is corroborated by studies and books which says that people expect you to stand for something if you are with the particular family with the certain surname, but maybe even more important is that if you come from a political family you have a generations old network to mobilize for you, people who will organize crowds for you, people who will mobilize voters to go to the booth on voting day people who will put up your posters and banners, so that ground network had been very crucial, now both of these are getting up ended by technology and as I said especially in the last five years now starting about 10 years ago we started seeing the use of telecom technology with bulk SMSs and bulk voice messages going out from leaders to millions of voters, subsequently in the last five years social media has begun catching the imagination as many hundreds of millions of Indians get on the Internet and many of them are on social media and other instant messaging platforms we have already seen many examples of first generation politicians creating a brand for themselves and creating mobilization of their message, of their voters through social media and through instant messaging platforms so to that extend the

ground has been levelled that your family name and your family networks are no longer such a huge advantage as they used to be and as I said the use of technology has levelled the playing field.

DJ: Back to the point about thick skin, perseverance and resilience how do you see technology playing out in the context of all the discussions about fake news and the ease with which it's easy to manipulate people's minds, how is that playing out?

JP: So there are two sides of the coin, we have had a world where information was curated where what is news was decided by limited number of editors and reporters so a few thousand people decided what, hundreds of millions of people should view or read that has got completely rent ascender by social media on social media and using technology everybody is a reporter, everybody is an editor so it has gone from the paradigm of one to many to a new paradigm of many to many and so that curating of news has been destroyed and many people are objecting to that that I don't agree is a valid objection, the curator of the news whether they be editors or whether they be reporters or whether they be opinion makers or politicians or others who were able to add weightage to a certain view point, this democratization of news has totally destroyed that, there is fake new but equally we have to recognize that fake news is not from any one sides, sometimes it gets projected as a fake news is coming from one side of the political spectrum, that's not true, there is fake news, there is trolling from all across the political spectrum, it has a darker sight to it, it inflames passions it sometimes target certain sections of the community and it creates all kinds of new issues that uncurated information will create, I will believe it's a phase that will transition as follows, recently just last week twitter has announced certain steps, so that the use of boards to retweet and recreate trends of certain news which large numbers of boards are tweeting will be curtain to some extent, now Facebook had been facing similar allegations and they have also started taking steps to put filters on this kind of efforts, now fake news used to be somebody planting a conspiracy theory or a totally fake document, recently there have been revolutions about Iran in Russia doing that, in the US and in other country's elections, I believe the answer to fake news is not to try and curtail social media but to have even more transparency, as social media develops further as it becomes ubicuters, I think there will emerge more trusted sources of news, more verifiable sources of news and it's a process so I am very much against the idea of restraining any kind of opinion, with one proviso that social media should not give you the right to threaten people any more than you can threaten people in real life so intimidation, threats, valance publishing your address so that people can create trouble for you, these are things that right to privacy should be translated into the law and by the way I have filed the first right to privacy law in parliament as a private members bill but besides the certain narrowly defined set of redlines no number of intimidation threats etc, opinions should not be restrictive.

DJ: Leadership development, as you reflect on yourself in what ways would you say you have grown as a leader, what are the muscles that you have built today that probably didn't exist when you started with the Rajya Sabha in 2000 or when you joined the Lok Sabha in 2009 how does that growth work?

JP: So I think it works differently for different people, I believe I have done the following, even as a student, even as a professional in the private sector I was always interested in global issues, I used to read newspapers and magazines from around the world but my depth on some of those issues has grown a lot so I spend a large amount of time on the few issues of, which I consider passions of mine this have to do with economic issues, these have to do with policies concerning health and education and foreign policy so for example on foreign policy I have involved in quite a number of track 2 dialogues and I chair many of these discussions with the US in South Korea, Japan etc. and as a result my depth on foreign policy, my understanding of nuances of where India is and where it ought to be and what are the foreign policy steps we ought to face these challenges is better and

more nuance so that's the muscle that I have built. I have a better understanding of economics than I did 15 years ago although I did have the solid understanding of economics and commerce and the trade coming from the private sector but a much better understanding for example on one of these track to two discussions, I have had a detailed discussion with one of the sovereign credit rating agencies and it helped me to understand why the fiscal deficit is so important, why is this so crucial because that's the single most important parameter that these rating agencies chose to base their ratings of a country, there are many other factors but the deficit is perhaps the single biggest weightage in that.

DJ: Just to understand the language when you say track two could you expand on that for a minute?

JP: So the Track 2 is a group of people involved in policy making it could be members of parliament, either politicians it could be diplomats, especially retired diplomats and people from the arm forces, people from business, people from journalism, civil society organizations, who interact in meetings and visits to other countries where this is not an official group, we don't represent the government of our country but we all have some kind of connection with policy makers to give feedback and ideas and suggestions and can have free and frank discussions between our counter parts and us the reason is when the government meet officially they have a lot of constraints within which to take positions and it is very difficult to come out with out of the box solutions. Out of the box solutions always come when back channels discussions first so it's sort of an informal back channel to help create out of the box ideas. Another channel where I have built that muscle, is with my transition to Lok Sabha nearly a decade ago and with my spending nearly two weeks of the every month in the constituency, I have built a branding in my constituency I have put in a lot of sweat into building my connect with couple of million people and a certain branding and certain mind shift or mind space if you will among couple of million voters is the muscle that I have built.

DJ: I am curious about how leaders think about Macro and Micro, how do you sort of manage this bird's eye view and worms eye view?

JP: So there has to be some compartmentalization but also with an overlap if any elected representative including me were to get bored of dealing with the mundane problems of his constituents then he is not going to last for very long and fortunately not only I don't get bored I enjoy meeting my constituents so if you or your listeners have gone to my social media pages you will see that I spend enormous amount of time with my constituents and I post about it all the time and some of my friends have told me that I despite the heat and dust and sweat that goes into this I seemed to be enjoying myself and yes I do, I actually enjoy meeting thousands of people every day and listening to their issues and discussing what's important for them, which are mostly always are local issues and trying my best to help them, I don't always succeed but to the extent that I do succeed people recognize that I am trying and even if it doesn't quite work out, they realize that I am sincerely trying for them and so that is a very important aspect, maybe there are some politicians who feel that, that factor of this is a burden then it can become a huge burden because that essential to get re-elected fortunately I don't feel it a burden I enjoy that, now when I am in Delhi, in Parliament or in some international forum talking about policy issues, it is mostly a different set of issues but not to say that there isn't any overlap, let's say I am talking climate change now it's a very Macro issue you would imagine that there is not that much connect to the local concerns of my constituents and almost never is there any climate change issue discussed in the constituency but I will tell you how it is relevant, so we still have large numbers of people in India who don't have electricity and they don't care how they get it, whether they get it from fossil fuels or whether they get it from solar energy they wanted yesterday and they want it cheap, solar energy is becoming now only the cost effective and alternative energy sources are only now just beginning to become cost effective just in the last couple of years so if we were to have a climate change discussion and

for the use of fossil fuels it wouldn't be a very practical discussion in the context of hundreds of millions of people not having electricity you can try to build a bridge to the future which is having a less carbon footprint but you can't ignore the pressures of the present and finding a solution to the present with the bridge to the future is the challenge that politicians must face when grappling with climate changing.

DJ: Three pieces of advice that helped you to become a better politician?

JP: The advice that I have received that have been most useful are very basic one was to never take people at face value some of us who come from professional background tend to think if a person says something he or she means it or that it must be accurate in politics you learn to take everything with the pinch of salt unless you have other corroborating factors. The other bit of advice I received was to never speak your mind unless you are very sure that it was a right thing to do because unlike in many other professions speaking your mind can have detrimental effects and this is a bit of advice I have not been followed very much because I am known for being candid and speaking my mind and the third thing one advice that have been very useful to me is to always keep the people in mind in politics you come across many intermediaries, you come across your local party office bearers, you come across local leaders, who have their own interest, their own stakes which may or may not be aligned with voters, so one of the lessons I learnt early on is if you align your interest with voters interest, so one example for instance is we get to sanction. One example of aligning to the voters has to do with the MP LAD funds these are the MPs local area development funds and there is immense pressure from local party officials to sanction them for small projects that they themselves can bit for end and the bill and the process benefit from and you don't see many remaining effects of the expenditure whereas the better thing to do which I have done is to ask the population in general rather than local party leaders and so one of the examples is that they wanted drinking water facilities which a larger project, each of them about 28 to 30 lakhs of rupees instead of 2 -3 lakh of rupees, now this doesn't affect you party workers very much but it benefits the population a lot and this is one of the reasons that I believe that I have been able to build the branding as somebody who cares for the people's problems rather than political workers it's not easy to do because you need your political worker's support also to do your grassroots campaigning and mobilization but this is where technology helps I was explaining earlier that even without those physical networks today you can do your mobilization on the ground using technology so being aligned to voters and their true concerns rather than the concerns of party workers is another good advice.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hi – This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. Just a quick comment here. This segment of my conversation with Jay reminds me of an earlier chat with Suresh Narayanan, MD of Nestle India Limited. While a big chunk of the conversation was around how he navigated the ship after the Maggi crisis, he also spoke about how he transitioned effectively across various markets when he moved across Egypt, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines and India.

SN: *“Especially at senior management levels it is important to step back and observe, so what I used to do in all the new situations is, I always walk around. I don't sit in my chair, I will walk around the office, I walk around to the sites, I walk around where talk to the common people, what are the kinds of things that interest you, what are the kinds of things that bothers you, what suggestion would you give to build this company better, I think there are ways in which you touch the lives of people, the minute you touched the lives of people you as a leader do not become unreachable anymore”*

DJ: As a CEO or as a political leader, I guess it is critical that one finds a mechanism of discerning the pulse of the people on the ground, whether it is your consumer or your supporter.

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DJ: When you look at to multiple things land on your table that require attention and that required resources, how do you prioritise, how do you think about the impact?

JP: We have a fundamental problem, which goes back to the first question you asked and I answered about the remnants of the British Raj Parliamentary system where I said that we have many reforms to implement so one example is we are probably the only parliament in the world which does not provide for office and staff for members of parliament and every other parliament when you go to the US Senate or Congress or the UK parliament and Australia members of parliament are treated as professionals in their own field they get an office they get a staff in India we don't, we get many perks but just the pitons for having an office and staff where we can barely have a telephone operator let alone a team of researchers or assistants which you need every day we literally get 100s if not 1000s pages of documents we get 100s of reports all running into thousands of pages it is very hard to keep up with all that unless you have assistance so besides campaigning for that reform, I have been taking advantage of certain facilities that are available such as there are now volunteers who intern at a political office for getting experience but they are lawyers, they are young professionals and they are able to assist with dealing with vast information that lands on our table everyday plus there are organizations that have come up such as PRS legislatives such as SWANEETI and others who have got funded projects for providing fellowships these are like internships but they are paid or again young professionals they could be engineers or lawyers or social workers, management people who take time off and spend a few months or a year or so working in a politicians office or a political party so this helps, now in terms of prioritising apart from information the overload of information one always has to prioritise any crises and sadly we have many crisis I have crisis in the constituency so for example very often in the summer months we have fire and since we still have a large number of thatch huts with lakhs of population every time there is a fire many families lose their belongings, everything that they have so I have to reprioritise my schedule and make sure I reach there and make sure that the governmental assistance and assistance from charities and others are mobilized so that they can get their lives back in order now this may not sound like a legislative priority for an for an elected legislator but if I am not there to stand with my constituents in their time of trouble then I wouldn't be a legislator, there wouldn't necessarily vote for me similarly in parliament priorities keep changing all the time it's not something that has a very rigid schedule so you have to role with the punches as they say.

DJ: What the world of business can learn from the world of politics? How do you think about the tight rope?

JP: I generally believe that in any profession can learn from the other professions but here there is a fundamental difference this idea of risk taking is relatively alien in politics is about avoiding failure about avoiding sleep ups and falling down largely it's not that no one takes risk but those are rare whereas a successful business particularly an innovative tech business might follow the precepts that you have mentioned fail fast and move on in politics its avoiding failure that becomes more of a

priority, I have noticed whereas in businesses most businesses urge their people to be decisive, to take decisions as quickly as practically possible in politics I have noticed that most decisions are delayed to as late as until you no longer avoid taking that decision for fear of making a mistake and one of the reasons is politics is about popularity and businesses are not where you can have businesses that are unpopular with people but are very successful because they deliver a product or a service or an innovative idea very efficiently whereas in politics it's hard to sustain if you lose popularity so these are issues that are quite different, I wish politics learnt a bit more from business, bit more risk taking and I wish businesses learnt a bit more about, politicians can be very good at adapting to the circumstances and very good at communicating why they have changed or adapted so these are lessons I think other professions can learn from.

DJ: How you think about influencing, how does an idea move from something in your head to something that's legislated?

JP: That idea about disqualifying convicted legislators didn't happen through the fear of politics even though I championed it and one or two others did it did not get traction but it was a supreme court ruling that made it happen so it was an externality in that sense we have many other such examples where the legislators and parliaments let the country down, go back 20 years when the courts again imposed natural gas for public transportation in Delhi it should have been a political decision and administrative decision, because of the pollution that we were facing but even today after much more pollution we are still struggling to take administrative decisions because of populism because of trying to pander to every section of society and that's the fact of the particular kind of political structure that we have whereas in many other countries even if you don't have everybody on board, you have a kind of majority on board then you can push through political ideas that again the idea of reforming our political structures our parliaments and how decision making happens but to take an idea and spin it and to get it to get traction communication skills are extremely important and also it is important to suss out public mood and try to latch on to the idea which is ripe because advocating an idea that is far ahead of its time is not going to get that much traction but advocating an idea that is only slightly ahead of its time maybe the right way of doing it because then the public maybe just about getting ready for it or your advocating it or communicating competently about it takes it over that hurdle and it becomes, it gets huge traction.

DJ: And how do you get that pulse?

JP: That is a critical political skill to be able to have feedback, you will notice, every time you ask a politician of any party they will always say they are doing very well they will never say they are doing badly very rarely they will say they are doing badly, particularly at any election campaign you ask the spoke persons of any party and they are all clear they are winning now that's the external face but internally the good politicians have a very good grasp of where they stand I have seen this among the most successful politicians they may externally be saying anything but internally they have a very clear grasp of reality and they know pretty much how they are doing whether they are doing well or badly or well in certain areas and badly in certain areas so that feedback loop has to be very good if you have to be successful in the politics.

DJ: And what is it about the channels that you need to have in place to have an objective and an effective feedback loop?

JP: We have earlier talked about politics rewards loyalty above all else, about competence, so you have a lot of sycophants in politics some parties more than others but yes you do. So sycophants are never going to always give you the right information they will give you information that you want to hear you must have your own system of bypassing that so I find that even politicians who are

surrounded by a lot of sycophants some of them so recognize that they have that ecosystem just because they need loyalists to entrench their hold on power but they don't rely on them for getting the feedback loop they get the feedback loop from other sources and if you don't then you are doomed to do badly in the next cycle.

DJ: And other sources would be things like?

JP: It could be journalists, it could be people on the ground that you know, it could be somebody several levels lower down on the chain of command whom you directly speak to, so for example I will make it a point because I meet with so many thousands of people in the constituency and I have an open channel, people can send me messages on instant messaging platforms and on social media so I get a sense for what people are talking about, so if I get a message or series of messages that runs counter to closest people are telling me then I will cross check and I will try to have it weighted as to what the reality is what are people really saying what are people really thinking? What is the factual condition, situation?

DJ: How do you think about excellence in the context of Politics?

JP: Ultimately politics is about improving a lot of people, improving the conditions of our voters and our country and not all politicians work like that, many of them work for their own benefit rather than for the national benefit but there are many examples of politicians who have done the right thing so take the example of P.V. Narasimha Rao he has spent decades being an apparent cheque of a particular party and in an odd set of circumstances suddenly pitchfork into the prime minister ship and he inherited huge crisis, where India was about to default on its external payments he used the crisis superbly to bring in reforms which either had been not thought about or even had been thought about were not implemented by earlier leaders so that was the fantastic thing he did and you can see the results of that even quarter century later that was a turning point take the example of Vajpayee another political leader who spent decades out of office and only two years at the end of his career as prime minister he shifted the gears with very dramatically on a particular aspects which meets this question of yours Indian politics had always been from independence very populist because we went from British Raj where the public's opinion didn't matter to suddenly public opinion mattering even when the country was 75% illiterate and 75% poor and so populism was the call of the day for many decades investing in hands out rather than on long term investments Vajpayee shifted the needle dramatically when he started this massive infrastructure program two fold, one was the golden quadrilateral, highways connecting the entire nation and the second once was the PMGS (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) building asphalt roads to the villages so today more than 90% of all Indian villages have as fault roads which has transformed their lives because just to take an example in Orissa, during the Monsoons for three to four months every year large sections of the populations used to be cut off from the civilization because everything around them was mud, they couldn't go to the local school, they couldn't go to the local hospital, they couldn't go to the market 10 Kilo meters away, now Vajpayee shifted the needle by taking a bold gambit it didn't pay off immediately but if you look 20 years later it has paid off hugely for anybody that spends time in rural India, you can recognize it, more recently the GST, now the GST creates the unified market although many people have advocated it, Manmohan Singh when he was prime minister and others but it was under the Modi government that it happened and it took enormous grit and enormous commitment to make it happen, it didn't happen on auto pilot it required a lot of scheduling and twisting of arms so that is an example of using political capital to bring about a seismic shift with all the difficulties of implementing GST and the initial hurdles will pail in the future when you look at the benefits that it brings about because for the first time India becomes unified domestic market, in the US it happened again many decades after their independence when they passed the interstate commerce act and this removes a lot of peculiar inversions in our economy, when we don't have

unified market which we didn't until now it used to be cheaper to send raw materials send abroad to get it processed into finished goods and then reimport it back whereas value addition was going elsewhere the profits were going elsewhere we were just consumers, that inversions get dramatically rectified. So these are three examples of leaders using either political capital or a crisis or a particular window of opportunity to shift gears in a very dramatic fashion.

DJ: In summary Playing to Potential in politics and otherwise to our leaders.

JP: We often dish politics and politicians and for good reason we see all the what's but we should recognize that democracy is something that billions of people aspire for so we must first cherish the fact that we have a democracy and then grapple with its short comings and try to improve them sometimes you fall into the pattern of thinking oh maybe democracy is the problem, it is not. Democracy is the solution but it is necessary but not yet a sufficient condition because it need further improvements, as far as people playing to their potential I would again Reutter it what we started out with you can improve the country, you can improve the world dramatically no matter whichever field you are in you can be in business, in science, in art you can be a social worker, you can be a doctor, you can be anything, you can be of course a politician also I would like to say, that to play to your potential you must, this is an old adage everybody knows it do things that you enjoy doing which matter. I said one of the requirements of the politicians is to spend a lot of time with constituents and some people do it as a burden others do it because they love being with people and you can see the difference in terms of the support that they get the branding that they build similarly do find your passion and pursue it it's much easier to succeed that way.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the conversation as purposeful as I did. There were three big takeaways for me in this conversation.

- 1) First - Each career path has a unique characteristic or a trait that I find worthwhile unearthing. For instance, Zia Mody spoke about attention to detail as something that is a critical trait that every lawyer must aspire to have. It was interesting to have Jay talk about resilience and agility as the key traits in the context of staying relevant as a politician
- 2) Second - The Track II dialogues that Jay spoke about. This is something that the business world could possibly learn from. Very often in business negotiations, say between an investor and a company, there can be positions that can be taken by each side and that can be hard to shake. How do we configure and simulate a Track II dialogue where each other's' point of view is well understood is indeed an interesting thought to mull over? An out of the box idea here is to see this as an opportunity for the High Potentials in each organization to engage and understand the context and co-create possible structural solutions. This needs to be fleshed out but the notion of simulating a Track II in a business context is an interesting opportunity indeed for the business world to learn from the world of politics.
- 3) Third is the point around setting up informal feedback loops. Several leaders in the corporate world struggle to do this. And the key point here is that you need to do this without disempowering your chain of command. Several leaders take a black and white approach to say, I don't want my team to feel that I am interfering in their business and do not reach to the people down the chain. But the tactful ones find an informal way of tapping into the sentiment of the people across the chain without really challenging the authority of their team members.

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End of transcription

Nugget from Nandan Nilekani that is referenced: [Reflections from Politics as a Career](#).

Nugget from Suresh Narayanan that is referenced: [Transitioning effectively to a new context](#).

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Baijayant Jay Panda - Nuggets

- 26.00 Baijayant Jay Panda - The Full Conversation
- 26.01 Baijayant Jay Panda - Politics as a career option
- 26.02 Baijayant Jay Panda - Markers of Long term Potential
- 26.03 Baijayant Jay Panda - Resilience
- 26.04 Baijayant Jay Panda - Staying relevant and leveraging technology
- 26.05 Baijayant Jay Panda - Generating options amidst political constraints
- 26.06 Baijayant Jay Panda - Balancing the macro and micro views
- 26.07 Baijayant Jay Panda - Three pieces of advice that stood out
- 26.08 Baijayant Jay Panda - Perspectives on Prioritization
- 26.09 Baijayant Jay Panda - Lessons for business from politics
- 26.10 Baijayant Jay Panda - Influencing an ecosystem
- 26.11 Baijayant Jay Panda - Perspectives on Excellence
- 26.12 Baijayant Jay Panda - 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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