



Guest

Chandramouli Venkatesan (Mouli) has a strong corporate track record of over 25 years. He is an alumnus of XLRI, Jamshedpur and spent his initial years in Sales and Marketing in Asian Paints, GE Capital and Onida. He worked with Cadbury's from 2005 till 2016. Over that time Cadbury metamorphosed to Kraft Foods and Mondelez and his last role there was Managing Director for India. In his decade-plus time there, he has worked across areas including Strategy, Marketing, HR and General Management across India and Asia Pacific. He now works with Pidilite Industries as CEO, Special Projects with the mission to create and set up a new business for them.

Mouli recently authored the book - Catalyst which was published by Penguin RandomHouse. It is a synthesis of his reflections around how leaders should think about the two questions - Where to go & How to grow - as they go through their respective journeys.

In this podcast conversation, Mouli talks about the notion of TMRR for leaders to turbocharge their personal growth, the concept of learning cycles when it comes to thinking about experiences, sowing the seeds for the second half in the first half, decoupling a quit decision and a join decision, impact of life on work and the role of values in personal growth and leadership.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 28th 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. Some of the past guests include Nandan Nilekani, Zia Mody, Pramath Sinha, Vinita Bali, Vishy Anand, Avnish Bajaj, Rama Bijapurkar, Atul Kasbekar, Amish Tripathi and the like.

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.

My guest this time is Chandramouli Venkatesan also known as Mouli who recently authored the book Catalyst, a best-seller published by Penguin RandomHouse. Mouli, till recently was the Managing Director for Mondelez in India. The book is an insightful take on how individuals should shape their career, make thoughtful choices along the way and take ownership of their own development in the journey. At some level, this Podcast is about the two questions people ask in their journeys – Where to Go & How to Grow. Mouli addresses both the questions with remarkable clarity and depth. Mouli divides up a career into two halves and talks about how people should approach the First half so that they can set themselves up for success in the second. It's been about 20 years since I graduated from IIMA and I find myself and a lot of my peer group at around Half-time between these two careers and I found some of his insights fascinating given my journey and context. What I really liked about the book and the conversation was that Mouli was able to take a

conceptual idea and provide tactical suggestions for how people could bake those ideas into their lives.

At the outset, I should mention that if you want to listen to conversation offline, say during an airplane ride or during a gym session or another time, you could access it at iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn or any of the other podcast apps that are out there. Without further ado, over to my conversation with Mouli.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Why you chose to write a book?

Chandramouli Venkatesan (CV): The story to the book has been an interesting story in itself, firstly connecting the dots backward bulk of my 25 years has been business and P&L role but there was a three-years period where I did a crossed functional stint as the head of HR at Cadbury in India and all of us as business leaders we have intuitive sense of what makes people succeed? But my three years in HR also helped me to put principles to that intuitive size and I think one of the ways I define the HR job for myself was how do I get people to succeed? It was a very simple phrase, and then around few years after that maybe 13-14 I was in Asia Pacific role and I did the Asia Pacific role out of Mumbai rather than Singapore because of personal considerations so I used to end up in Singapore Airlines four times a month I must have taken 60 flights 80 flights in a period of two years and I mean there is only so many movies that you can see if you flies off and so I decided that I must be productive in the flight and I just started writing answer to the question, what makes people successful? How do you succeed? And maybe over 40-50 flights I felt I had enough material and I said if this sounds interesting let me convert it to a training program and I created a training program called tea off with Mouli, which comes out of my golfing passion but got nothing to do with golf, it's all about success and then I was doing this program for whoever is interested, so I covered about 35-40 sessions as off now about 22 companies and just helping people succeed and as I was doing this program the feedback was overwhelming continuously to say this is life changing, this is helping me you must try and write a book this can't be only, this can't be constraint with your time so it must have an audience beyond your time, so that feedback was continuously there and then the trigger just happened when I decided to take a brief sabbatical between two jobs and I said if I not get it done now I will never get it done so that's the way it went.

DJ: And on that note even the desire to take a sabbatical, I have often seen people tried to back to back their life what was behind the need to take a sabbatical or the desire to take a sabbatical?

CV: I think basically you reach points in your career where you say that you just need to pause a little bit have a think on what motivates you? What drives you? And I think I reached that phase where I said I need to give myself just a little bit of time with myself without trying to prove something every day.

DJ: How you thought about ROI and how you ended up with book as a means of maximising ROI,

CV: so the context of this was the ROI for social impact, to say each one of us tries to do some kind of social impact bulk of us give money, some of us also give time and I think the question I asked myself was, if I am willing to go beyond money and give some time what's the best ROI to that time? And a lot of us the moment we think social impact, we think how do I go and teach maths to

underprivileged children or how do I go and clean up some dirty place or how do I do some volunteering? And all that is valuable but those are not using your skills you are just another person, anybody can do that and you can do that. I think for people like us who have also built skills if we can find a way of having social impact which also leverages our skills then the social impact is going to be multiplied and I think that's the mindset I brought and said my skills is in helping people succeed and that was the best way I can create social impact is to create more successful people in this country as oppose to cleaning up a dirty place and I think that's the approach I took and I took all the mediums available for that, it's a session, it's a show like this it's a book, all mediums available.

DJ: Expand a little bit more on TMRR.

CV: Let's go to the very context, why that's very important which is to succeed I think one of the most important thing is to build the right experience and what I found was the very notion and understanding of the concept of experiences poor. For all of us we think experience=time so we say I have ten years' experience of something, time is a input, Experience is the output the output cannot be equal to the input so if you are putting 10 years somebody can end up with 5 year experience out of it and somebody could end up with 15 years of experience out of it. And what I found was the difference between successful people and less successful people was their ability to convert time to experience. Successful people seem to have a higher conversion of time to experience they got most experience out of the time they put in and less successful people also put in the same hard work in the same time but they don't seem to get the same experience out of the time they have put so that's the context to the game and hence I was going to trying to answer the question what is it that successful people do to convert their time to experience, what's the module? And that's where I came to the TMRR construct, which are Target, Measure, Review and Reflect. And if I can give you a bit of a story in that one which is a activity we put a lot of time which is walking and we have all been walking for so many years but we don't thing walking is an experience for us and the reason I don't think walking is an experience is because my walking today is not better than what it was five years back but I put in a lot of time but I do nothing to convert that time to experience but if you take up athlete in the Olympics who is participating in a 15 Kilometres walking race the same walking is converted to experience by that athlete, while walking is not an experience for you and me it's an experience for that person and hence I asked what is that, that person does? What that person does is TMR which is for walking that person as a target to say I want to do 15 kilo meters in 3 hours 36 minute as a measure to say I did it in actuals in 3 hours 40 mins and then as a review which is I had uphill section downhill section flag section I possibly didn't do a uphill well which means I have to strengthen my ham strings and as a process of improving walking and converting walking into an experience, so that was I think the insight around which I built TMR and then I realized that a lot of people in a corporate world have this assumption that TMR is something which happens by itself because companies make you do TMR through annual appraisal process gold sheets or you have a target you have a measure you have a review and people mistakenly assume that, that TMR process if building experience for you. That TMR process is designed to ensure that you deliver the results that the company requires so if a boss reviews you it's often a review for results in task the purpose of that review is not that how do you convert your time to your experience.

DJ: I guess it drives company P&L but does not drive your individual balance sheet, Individual balance sheet and a company P&L I think that's the disconnect.

CV: And which is where I brought the fourth R which is reflection and really saying that for the time that you have put in if you asked the question what could I have done better then you actually have a very efficient way of converting time to experience.

DJ: To make it tactical Mouli when you reflect on your journey and some of the other leaders you might have studied to come up with this insight any tactical suggestions on how people can bake this habit as they go through life?

CV: I think it really just a focus on habit building, a lot of good things in life, I mean one of the interesting things of habits is they say bad habits are easy to build and good habits are difficult to build and a lot of good things in life, we say we want to do but we don't get around to doing it be at exercise, be at reading, be at reflection so how do we convert it into an habit is the question that I have pushed people my own reflection habit for example, I have tried to make it a habit to say every day in the evening when I go back home from office sitting in the car the first fifteen minutes I asked the question what could I have done better? So now I have a very anchored habit of saying the moment I get into the car I reflect and it's an automatic process and it happens for every nature of activity I have done and I will give you a very interesting anecdote, very early on in my career right in the first year in fact I joined as a management trainee in Asian paints but that was the exigency and the godown was suddenly unmeant so they put me into the godown saying the business has to run we will figure out the fact that you are a fancy MBA later but right now you are going to run the godown so I ended up running the godown for three four months a lot of people who would think oh I am wasting my time I am doing a manual job of counting boxes and reconciling boxes in the paper and so on and so forth now if you go out with the mindset of saying I want to convert that time to experience which is valuable, with the same go down standing there you can either do the just mechanical activity of reconciling boxes with paper ensuring goods come in, goods go out or you can also learn about the business and I learnt many things about the business standing there. First thing I learnt was how order patterns happen? When do orders come? Which kind of retailers order went, city retailers, how's their order pattern different from up country retailer how is month end orders different from month beginning orders which excuse used ordered in full boxes, which excuse get ordered in half boxes it was almost like a analytical process for me if I chose to look at that data that way and hence for example in hindsight when I got into marketing them I knew how to design boxes and I knew sitting there in the go down that most people who have design the boxes have never sat in the godown and it was very inefficient to manage those boxes in that go down, so I think it's just a mindset that you bring to say I can take any activity and convert it to a valuable experience if I think of it in that way, if I think of it as a manual activity, I can execute it as a manual activity if I think of it as an analytical activity with a lot of data from which I can get insights I can execute it that way.

DJ: How do you decode experience from time? If you were a recruiter how do you distil experience and not just time?

CV: I think it's one of the greatest insights in my life and I changed how I hire about six-seven years back once I myself crystalized this insight for me and I realize that bulk of us as an interviewer are asking what people have done? They are seeing what have you done? Explain what you have done? That is of no use to me the purpose of experience is if I look at two candidates, it's a fifteen year candidate and a ten year candidate my implicit assumption is that if in my business in a situation in the future the response of the fifteen year person has to be better than the response of the ten year person and hence what is of value to me is not what the person has done? But how using what they have done, they are going to respond the situations in my business and hence I changed my interviewing to reading CVs and saying if this is what you have done then these are the situations you should be good at and I would form the situation and in the interviews I would give the situations and say now give me your response if you have truly done what you have done you would give me a great response if you are only pirating what has been done by many others in your company then you will give me a lousy response. So I changed a lot of my interviewing to saying give me response to my situation.

DJ: The other piece that struck my attention was, you talked about raising the game where it matters something that is associated with the people like Roger Federer or a Dhoni hitting that six in the world cup and you mentioned that in the context of learning cycle I would love to know what you have in mind and if you can expand on this for the listeners?

CV: My observations of building experience were that part of the experience was also driven by which learning cycles you participate in? so for example if there is a very big new product being launched and you have been involved in that learning cycle from day 1 right till the launch you end up with the certain kind of experience so how does there is an organizational transformation and you have been involved in conceptualising it all the way to the execution so I called it a learning cycle which is end to end you are involved with the beginning to an end what I found was that successful people seem to participated in what I called it is major learning cycles. Yes there are Major learning cycles and Minor learning cycles, so successful people firstly seemed to participated in Major learning cycle, which has add a transformational impact on their development and their experience building process.

DJ: And how do you distinguish the two? Major v/s Minor?

CV: I think it is quite simply to say that if you have to say in each learning cycle there's a certain learning potential and all learning cycles don't have the same potential so the bigger the potential for learning the more major the learning cycle is its I think the simple way to looking at it. What the other thing I have noticed is successful people do is they somehow seemed kick the gear when they get to a Major learning cycle they know that this is a major learning cycle and I must be in better form here it is like saying that if you are Dhoni then you somehow realize that the world cup final is when you have to at your best, it's a major event and I think similarly in careers the successful people somehow seemed to lift themselves one gear in Major learning cycles and I think that's a skill that we can all cultivate to say the moment I recognize I am in a Major learning cycle how do I lift myself a gear and it does two things one is a Major learning cycle is a Major learning opportunity for you and I means if you lift yourself and operate at higher level you end up learning a lot more which builds your experience and the second thing in the major learning cycles is also important to the company and if you lift yourself a gear in that important event then your contribution is significant and it has a very positive benefit on your careers in the future.

DJ: What are the foundation people can lay in the first half that helps them in the second half?

CV: In the book Catalyst one of my strong believes is the first half is the Catalyst for the second half and I think that's the way I like to frame it but it is actually useful to start as a story, the Rabbit and the tortoise story as we all have heard which is the race between the Rabbit and Tortoise which the Tortoise wins because the Rabbit kind of becomes lazy and the moral of the story is slow and steady wins the race so sometimes as I do this sessions I ask people do you like slow and steady wins the race as a moral for careers? And typically the young people don't like it they don't like slow in anything and I also don't advocate people being the tortoise in their career but I certainly advocate and say don't try and be the Rabbit in your career no cricket match can be one in the first five overs in the match, similarly no career can be won in the first five ten years of your career and if you examine careers, I have noticed two things the first thing I have noticed is most people succeed in the first half of their careers equally I have noticed very few succeed in the second half of their careers and sometimes I like to say it provocatively to say even idiots succeed in the first half of their careers and even good people in the second half of their career so if you want a great career you have got to solve the problem of how am I going to be successful when I get to the second half that's the key problem to be solved every other problem will solve itself and the answer to that problem is in the first half. "The first half is the catalyst for the second half" there are two things you can

manage your first half you can have an outcome in the first half of saying I want to be successful in my first half or you can have your outcome in your first half where you say I want to use my first half for being successful in the second half you can have two career objective for the first half, Many choices you make hopefully both the objectives are coinciding, what helps you succeed in the first half, helps you succeed in the second half those are the easy choices but there will be times when you have to make choices where what makes your feet successful in the first half is not going to help you in the second half. The trade off and that is where am I strong advocacy is always make the trade off in favour of what will help you in the second half.

DJ: Give us an example what do you have in mind? What is the kind of choices people, what is the mistakes people end up making here?

CV: One of the mistakes people end up making here is length of roles, typically they want to get to the next role in 18 months in the first half, they don't want to put into under three years in the current role because the next role is the promotion possibly a slight salary increase and so on and so forth now how does this impact when you get into the second half, in the first half what tends to happen is a lot of your success is by conquering low hanging fruit, so typically in the first year of any job or 18 months of any job there is enough low hanging fruit in any road and if you solve the low hanging fruit, you have a degree of success, you look good and on the basis of that you can get a promotion, you can get a job, so on and so forth, when you come to the second half the job of leaders in the second half is to solve for high hanging fruits it is a junior who solves for low hanging fruits you don't get to senior and again solve for low hanging fruit but if in your first half you have never given yourself that time to solve high hanging fruits then you never built the skill of solving high hanging fruit so you end up being very successful in your first half by solving many low hanging fruits, one fine day you come to the second half where what you need to succeed is solving high hanging fruits and you never built to that capability now to build to that capability you needed to have some patience in the first half where you say I will give myself three years where the first year I solve low hanging fruits and then the second and third year I will solve for the more complex high hanging fruits, now that skill building is a contradiction with my need for a promotion every 18 months, so that's the example.

DJ: How you think people should pick mentors as they go through the journey?

CV: Firstly, mentors are hyper crucial in today's careers. Because I think careers are non-linear it's quite unpredictable and hence I have many choices which you don't know how to make well. And you need somebody's help to make career choices well, nobody is there today who can make their own career choices perfectly so you need mentors the question then comes to say then how do you choose the mentor? And I think I have two or three principals on that first and for most a mentor is different from a career counsellor and the key difference is the mentor has the personal interest in you succeeding a career counsellor, I can counsel 1000 people today if they come to me and say give me advice I will give but I am giving it from neutral principle, I don't know them and I don't have a stake in their success but a mentor must have a stake in your success so that's I think one of the most important principals for me hence they know you and they care for you. The second thing is a mentor must be able to provide a view which is different from your view so often we make career choices talking to our peers our friends. The thing is all of us have the same view because of we are at rough stimulus stage of the career so we look at the same direction it is like you are in a road, you are in a 20th Kilo meter, you are looking at a 30th Kilo meter all of you are at the 20th Kilo meter a mentor must have a different view to your career, the mentor is at the 30th Kilo meter looking back and saying this is how the journey looks, looking back so mentor must be somebody who can give you a different view and hence must be at a stage of career and a position which is a view different from yours and the third principal are like in choosing mentors is no conflict of interest, a mentor

must give advice based on only what is good for you and they have no conflict of interest in either managing their own requirement or the requirements of the organization they have only one criteria which is what is good for you? I think this is how you construct the mentor and which is why it is so difficult to find mentors.

DJ: In terms of mentors how have you thought about mentors? Has it been one or two people or has it been a pool of people that you have consult at key moments in time?

CV: I think it is difficult to have many mentors there would of course be many people that you consult but I think the difference between consulting and mentoring is in consulting you take the opinion and then you make the choice, mentoring sometimes you must be willing to even go by the mentor's choice if it is different from yours so hence it must be people you deeply trust and I have sometimes gone by mentors choice which are different from mine so it has been a few key people where I have built that degree of trust, where I have the confidence that they will only suggest it for my good.

DJ: It's a very interesting point to make because some of the suggestions might be in the realm of what you haven't seen yet back to the paradigm of where you are in the race or where you are on the road they probably have seen some elements of the road that you haven't seen yet so to that extent they might have a slightly wiser point of view.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. What I really liked in this segment was the point Mouli makes about careers becoming non-linear and there being several more forks in the road today than there were maybe 20 years ago. I believe, the two big questions we need to navigate as we go through our careers are Where to go & how go grow? People often think about mentors in the context of personal growth. While that is true, like Mouli says, I believe they can add significant value when we have a fork in the road and have a tough decision to make.

Very often people get lucky and get eye-opening insights on themselves in the most unexpected of places. One of my earlier guests Anu Madgavkar (AM) (who is now a Partner at McKinsey Global Institute but started her career in Banking) talks about an interview with a very Senior Partner at McKinsey who got her thinking about what sort of an environment she would flourish in.

AM: *"I go back actually to the moment of epiphany that I had in a very unexpected place which was when I was being interviewed by one of the most senior partners in McKinsey 15 years ago when I was applying to join the firm and I have had a series of interviews which went fine and then this very senior partner was sitting there and he said, asked me a little bit about my career goals or something like that and I started telling him that how I enjoyed every aspect of my professional journey so far except this one particular phase and he stopped me there in my track and he just in a very penetrating way he said why did you not enjoyed that phase and sitting in that interview actually I went through a moment of complete self-awareness, I was not aware of this but because he asked me that pointed question I took a couple of minutes to think about it and then I came back and I said as I think about everything I discovered in that phase that I am not fundamentally a very comparative person I am much more a collaborative person and that situation demanded a level of comparative behaviour that I was not very comfortable"*

DJ: Building on Mouli's point, it makes sense not to rely on luck but have a Personal Board of Directors who can be of value during crucial moments. I guess the benefit of Mentors is three fold

- 1) They have a deep insight into you and what makes you tick
- 2) They are truly vested in your success
- 3) They have a view from a vantage point which is very different from yours and their input, whether right or wrong will definitely make your decision more robust

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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 Mouli.

DJ: I also like the point you make in the book about decoupling quitting decision and a joining decision, talk to us a little bit about the nuance here?

CV: I must say that this is been one of the my insights from my own life where I felt that at least one decision I made poorly because I made a quit decision because I got something which looked attractive and I should have never quit that place in the first place and again in my HR times I have seen many people quit because they thing they have got something better but they had no reason to quit and somehow I kept asking why is this happening? And that's when I realized that people are coupling these two decisions and the trigger to quit was actually coming in the form of an opportunity and I said that's where a lot of mistakes happen and that's where people kind of go wrong in their careers and hence the recommendation that I have is decouple these two decisions. You must know first whether you have a reason to quit? And the reason to quit cannot be that I found something else, that journey is the never-ending journey there also you will find something else and you will find something else so you must know do you have a reason to quit? And the way I like to think about the reasons to quit is I think there are only two reasons you should quit, one is either your learning is tapering off and you are stagnating in your learning or you are experiencing an issue of fit so it could be a culture or values or chemistry or whatever it is, these are the only two reasons you should quit everything else promotions, salary, career all that is secondary, if you are driving learning all that follows so you must first find out if you genuinely have a reason to quit which is learning and fit once you conclude that there is a reason to quit then you can figure out all the join opportunities but if you start the other way around and you end up saying oh I have got the opportunity but actually I don't have a reason to quit then you end up making mistake.

DJ: It's not that you are dissatisfied with the current place but there's an opportunity for a bigger play so how do you distinguish that kind of a situation from what you have just outlined which is leaving for the wrong reason?

CV: I think my answer to that question is you get to that bigger play and you get another bigger play after that and then another bigger play after that are you going to say yes to each bigger play that comes your way? We all celebrate the successes that are few people seem to have got by getting to a bigger place for every one success I have seen three failures where people have gone to what on paper looks bigger but their career hasn't necessarily moved in the right direction after that and they would have been actually better off if they had stayed so I think the question is again what drives careers? Is it position or is it your capabilities? The key mindset I bring is to say what drives career is your capability and if you are in a place where your learning is very rapid, your career is a given, even

if you say no to something which looks attractive right now your career is a given because your learning is growing at such a pace and this is the market place that takes care of people who learn, it's a very simple mindset.

DJ: And for somebody who is in that maze going through that career how do you objectively determine if you are going through a learning cycle? Is there an insight into people recognizing the pace of learning or the quantum of learning that they are going through?

CV: I think I would possibly give an analogy of sport, sometimes you know a player is in a zone and is kind of effortlessly doing stuff and is also enjoying themselves. I would think your learning will be very high when you are in a zone, in whatever you are doing at work and if you are feeling that way you are possibly in a fantastic learning cycle and I wouldn't give that up for anything.

DJ: In the book you talked about the specific transition from Asia Paints to GE country wide and you talked about that's the transition that you shouldn't have made so why do you say that and what's the thinking behind that conclusion?

CV: That mistake I have made was actually an inspiration for me to write the chapter on quit and join to say how does one segregate the decision to quit and the decision to join and I made the decision to quit from Asian Paints without having sound reasons to quit I made the decision to quit because I thought something else is more attractive and then I realize that I was actually in a major learning cycle in Asian Paints I was in an absolute zone I was contributing effortlessly I was learning, I was getting to do new stuff but I gave all that up because I thought that something else is more attractive and I think knowing when you are in a learning zone, knowing where you have a company? Where you have a high fit? And these are important parameters in managing your career and that was I think the mistake I made and that inspired me to write a chapter.

DJ: What's the take away, in terms of how you evaluate the new opportunity both from a fit stand point and a potential learning cycle stand point?

CV: In my HR days I used to try and mentor a lot of people because you end up talking to a lot of people who are trying to quit and trying to explain to them, why it's not a good decision? And obviously in these things you have to get them to the right decision there's nothing you can do so I formed a 2by2 matrix and I said one is what's good about where you are? And what can be better? And equally what's good about where you are going to go? And what can be better? And what I found that most people when they make that quit decision they can see only two boxes, they are going to see what is going to be good where I am going to go? And what is bad about where I am? They are not able to see the other two boxes which is what is good about where I am and what could be bad about where I am going to go? And hence I think one of the important ways of what I used to do was to try and get people to see all the four boxes then make a fair decision so I think one of the things I encourage people to make those four boxes and do not underleverage what is good about where you are? And do not assume that there will not be bad stuff where you are going to go? Give those equal weightages and then make a holistic decision.

DJ: How have you thought about the success at various points in time and with the benefit of the journey how would you think about it if you went back in time?

CV: I think it's a very challenging question and I have tried to define it in the book at some stage to say what motivates people in their career? And I kind of through a set of inspiration and my own decoding I figured out there is a pyramid of motivation, most of us are motivated at the base of pyramid by the need to achieve, which is how do I achieve material benefits, how do I achieve a

reputation? A designation a sense of success so on and so forth I think the next stage of motivation is what I called mastery, which is how well I do stuff? So as a marketer it is also important for me to achieve success but also to say when I put out the new product or I put out new piece of advertising it must look with the Mouli stamp of class and quality and mastery and how well you do stuff and the last leg of motivation is purpose which is why do I do stuff? I think typically what tends to happen is, you graduate up this pyramid, we tend to start as achievers at some stage we just say some achievement is not enough of a motivation for me I also wanted to do stuff well I want to be a master of what I do. A lot of people don't get to purpose at all, which is why do I do it? I also went through the same journey, I had been an achiever and out and out achiever very driven kind of an achiever I think I felt moved fairly quickly to mastery to it doesn't, I don't feel motivated only by saying I achieved something I must do stuff very well I must always set bench marks and standards of what I do? But I think I passed that phase of that fairly quickly and I was struggling for motivation and I think somewhere then everybody has to find their own purpose, I found my purpose in my HR stint. Where I suddenly found that the ambition of wanting to help people succeed was a powerful ambition and I think that became suddenly my purpose to say whatever I do I create results for the business but in that process I must make people better and that became a purpose and that then gives me a purpose to anything I do as simple as a market visit and I go to a market visit and I meet four people of my company in the market visit, I am not doing the market visit only to find out what is good and bad in the market. I am saying in that market visit I must make those four people better as a result of having spent a day with me. And that suddenly gives me more purpose to a market visit which otherwise after 26 years you get tired of doing market visits, you do it a little more ceremonially so I think finding that purpose is actually the final unlock.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here again. The point Mouli makes about Purpose is a profound one and it can make all the difference especially as one gets senior. If you are interested, do look up Simon Sinek's TED talk on the Power of Why. Its possibly one of the most viewed TED talks. One of my earlier guests was Viren Rasquinha (VQ), who used to play Hockey for India and now is the CEO of Olympic Gold Quest; spoke about this in the context of what makes athletes resilient. OGQ works with Elite athletes and helps them prepare for medals at the Olympics.

VQ: *"the why is very important for every person and what does it mean to that person and I have seen many super talented athletes but just the why is not clear to them they are sort of drifting and it's not very clear to them what is their dream, why are they doing what they are doing every single day in training and for me the why has always been very clear and that i wanted to win an Olympic medal as a player and I shattered when I couldn't win it for myself and now what drives me every single day is to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated for the next generation of players"*

DJ: The key is that over time, we all need to find an inner driver that will push us towards achieving great things. And that comes from having clarity on the Why question.

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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 Mouli.

DJ: Mouli, how do you think about the notion of Work and Life and the interplay between them?

CV: The context that I mentioned which is the whole game of work life and what I have heard continuously in the corporate world is a work life conversation is a one way street the traffic flows from only one way which is work to life and the only thing we discuss is what are the impact of work on life? My belief and what I have written in Catalyst is the impact of work on life is lesser than the impact of life on work and fundamentally let's take an anecdote there was an anecdote of Albert Einstein who goes on to say in his biography that he believes that he was a great Physicist and a Scientist because he played a lot of Violin in his life and he believes that helped him be a great Physicist and Scientist just an anecdote on what you do in your life but if you were to bring it down to you and me to succeed in work for example you have to be a good team player, now imagine somebody who has played a lot of team sports in their life what we call is life does it have some bearing on how they will be as a team player had worked? Now this doesn't mean you can't be a good team player if you haven't played team sports but I am just linking and saying the stuff you do in your life has bearing on your work and hence the question is can you design your life? Now all this is happening by accident, Einstein happened to be born in a family who has western classical passion, his mother started teaching him violin at the age of 4, if he had been born in some other family maybe he would not have learnt violin, maybe you and me wouldn't have played team sports best on our ... so these happen by accident, what we do in our life happens by accident suppose if we were to turn it around and were to say that I want to live my life and design my life in a certain way which enhances my probability of success at work what would I do? Would I actively play more team sports? It not only gives me sports and health that benefits but that also helps me to do something else. Would I actively choose to pursue certain hobbies and I have a chapter on passionate striving hobbies as I call it Passionate and Striving being the key qualifiers and pursuing those hobbies that did help me at work. Would I actively seek to do some kind of social missions? Which improves my understanding of human behaviour and people and raises my empathy and my listening which makes me a better leader.

DJ: Talk to us about some of the choices that you have made on the life front which you think has positively impacted the work front?

CV: Two or three aspects of my life have definitely contributed to work. The first is the passionate hobbies again by accident I ended up running marathons and in my HR days I was trying to get people in company tour on marathons and I said I have to lead from the front so I said I will also enrol and run marathons and then I started playing golf and both marathons and golf, these are what I called as striving sports there's tremendous striving you are not kind of running a marathon for pleasure, you are kind of running a marathon to get better you are fighting against yourself to get better. The primary game you are playing is not to beat somebody else but to say how do I get better? And I think some of these does that, I think often in our careers we often end up in a mode where we are saying we are trying to win which is different from an orientation of how do I get better? In a marathon you don't try to win, you try to get better, once you built that kind of an orientation let's say in a striving hobby, where you say I am trying to get better you bring that orientation into your career, where you say I am no longer trying to win which is about beating somebody and being better but I am going to try to get better in what I do? So I saw that shift in me, tremendously where I have moved from trying to win to saying I must do everything better. I think the other thing of my life which severely impacted me was some of my social pursuits and again happened by accident but I got into it by depth and I was involved in a few social projects which was around certain villages where we were trying to develop some communities and I think there was some suppressed human side in me in the early part of my career where I was just trying to be an achiever and I think the social pursuits really brought out the human side in me and I will say there is the world there are human beings and they need to be human and I

think it's tremendously impacted by leadership I think I would have been a very poor leader if I had not gone on that social messages.

DJ: In what ways? If you could expand on what's the nature of osmoses you see from the life to work? Specifically, on this point around influencing your leadership?

CV: I think the few areas, first and foremost I think the concept of empathy its widely spoken poorly practiced and I think the challenge is partly around individuals challenge also work context, when you are pushing people for results it's difficult to be empathetic and often empathy is confused with accepting poor results I think the empathy is in sitting in that chair and say how can I help you for results? But I think the concept of empathy I got a lot more and to say how do you push for results I am not going to lower my push for results but how can I understand you better to help you push for your results, I think the empathy was something which came from there. I think the second thing which came from some of my social pursuits was the fact that we are human being and there is tremendous amoebic, organic quality to human being and if you tend to over structure and over complicate which is often driven by your need to be in control you don't necessarily get to results and you have got to feel more comfortable for the osmotic amoebic process to take place and hence shifting from control and managing to shifting to managing through purpose and through vision and saying people will find their way of getting there as well so those are some impacts that social piece had of me.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here again. Just a quick comment here.

One my earlier guests Meher Pudumjee, Chairperson of Thermax spoke about her passion for music and why she preferred Singing in Choir rather than playing the Piano:

MP: *"I started with piano when I was seven and along the way came quire and I thornily enjoy singing, not individually but in a group it's a fantastic group and I love being with people whom agile with and think alike or we have the similar interest and this is one of them and I find that quire is almost like a meditation in some ways it's taking you away from the humdrum of life and our conductors is one who has always believed in explaining to us what the words that we are singing mean and that is made a big difference in terms of if you know if there is a purpose to the way you are singing to what you are singing the music sounds enormously better than if you are just singing the words and I think the same thing is for business"*

DJ: I do think we lead one life and there is often a significant missed opportunity of integrating the various facets and letting osmosis happen across domains. Now back to the chat with Mouli.

DJ: The other piece you speak about in book Mouli is the notion of 'LODE star values' you emphasize humility and pristine honesty, so talk to us about what you have in mind when you use these terms and what's been your experience in cultivating these values over a period of time and what can we learn?

CV: It's a phenomenal piece, so I think in the book Catalyst I think one of my strong belief is that values can be a great can be a great Catalysts to success and I think the first thing I am trying to changes in peoples mind is about values, what has happened in the corporate world, all of us have seen examples of people being reprimanded for poor values, so we have seen somebody being

sacked because they travel bill, somebody being sacked because they did some form of sexual harassment or conflict of interest this and that, we have never seen somebody who have got a promotion because they were honest for 40 years in corporate life so the implicit coding that has got into all of us with respect to values is if you screw up on values you are in trouble but we haven't internalized that fact that if you raise your values it can actually be a means to success. So there is a coding in us to say limit is a down side I want to change that coding from limit is the downside in the book to leveraging the upside so that's the first message that I try to give in Catalyst once you decide you want to do that then the question is how to do it? And my belief is the way to do it is to be a load star in some values. All of us are moderate to above average in many values but that's everybody if you want to get the upside of values there has to be one or two values where you can say I am the best, in the million people I am the best on simplicity, that's what gives you the break through impact, I like to refer to Gandhiji as an example, he is a leader I thought become a great leader based on great values, you can discuss whether he was having the best strategy for independence and I am sure there are many others who had good strategy for independence but the independence movement required a leader who could get people to follow because it was a difficult journey and that followership he got because he was in load star in integrity and simplicity so people who are willing to do difficult things including sacrificing their jobs and their personal lives for the sake of the cause he was leading so I think getting to load star value and saying I will be the best of integrity, I will be the best of simplicity, I will be the best of authenticity in whatever you chose is breakthrough in its leadership capability, it gets people to follow you, you can take difficult journeys if you are load star in values and specifically then going to the honesty value which I kind of really feel passionate about and my mission is to change that value in society, The interesting thing is in the 50 years of my life, I am yet to meet somebody who themselves says I am dishonest so possibly I haven't counted how many people I met but I am sure its 100 or 1000s. So everybody is honest and the reason that happens is because you get to set your own standard of what is honesty? So it is not an exam where 40 marks are passed and 30 marks are failing. So if your current standard, your performance of honesty is 60 marks, you say the pass mark is 50, the current is 50 you say pass mark is 40, if your current performance is 40 you say your pass marks is 30 you get to decide what is the standard of honesty and you always set this standard of honesty lower than your current performance so everybody is honest nobody is dishonest and the tragedy of our country is every Indian thinks they are honest but collectively all of us will agree that India is more dishonest as a country than honest so we are in this paradox and we are in a slightly more dishonest country where every Indian thinks they are honest and I think hence the problem I was dealing to say how do we explain to people that they have to change their standard of what they consider as honesty. And that's where I came up with this 2by2 matrix which is saying, what bulk of us practice is what we call as majority honesty which is I do right when everybody else is doing right but I feel very comfortable doing wrong when others are doing wrong so if everybody is bribing for getting a ration card then I also don't mind bribing for a ration card and when I bribe for the ration card I don't feel I am dishonest, same thing in the traffic signal, if everybody is bouncing the signal I will also bounce now I am doing wrong but even if I am doing wrong I don't feel dishonest so that's what I call majority honesty which is we are comfortable doing wrong as long as others are also doing wrong the fact that it is wrong doesn't seem to affect us the fact that I am doing wrong doesn't make me think that I am dishonest and I think resetting the standard what I am advocating is we cannot be making decisions on what is acceptable we have to make decisions based on what I think is right. Which is different from what is acceptable, it might acceptable to bribe for something but the moment you ask the question is it right? The answer is different. And I defined pristine honesty as somebody who says I will do right even when others are doing wrong, it's easy to do right when everybody is doing right, but it's difficult to do right whether other seemed to be doing wrong be it a traffic signal or be it something else and if you have the courage to do thing right even when others are doing wrong that's where you get to load star at honesty.

DJ: Reflecting on this journey that you have been through, both the journey of your career and the journey of reflection on some of the themes around career and life how has this thinking improved your parenting approach?

CV: I honestly not thought about it. like of all us feel we could have been better parents, may be the first thing about just the time we gave, but the good thing I think I learnt fairly early on, I think I learnt the work life balance game early on and say it's important to have a good life because it helped me succeed, I am very proud that in the last 10 or 12 years I think I want three Saturdays to work or something like that, so I think the first part of parenting for me has been to find some time and I think that's been good, the second part of parenting for me is just role modelling I think far too often as parents may be we focus on telling them what they have to do our children we tell them what they have to do, without realising that they actually learn what they have to do by observing what we do? And not listening to what we say but observing what we do? And I think I am very conscious as a role model in those situations and saying if I am role modelling the right behaviour continuously, even if I don't tell my daughter what she has to do, she will obviously and hopefully pick up what I am doing so those are possibly being some of my philosophies.

DJ: How did you think about opportunities early on in your career? What are some of the considerations you had in your head?

CV: With my own example, I think very intuitively I did put a criteria of fit very early on even in my campus journey and I knew I have a certain kind of personality and if I were to name companies, I knew I wouldn't fit into Citi bank and nothing wrong about Citi bank it is just that my personality is different from what it takes to succeed.

DJ: and how did you get to that conclusion what's the data that you had about city bank you had at that time?

CV: Partly it sense and partly about who are the kind of people who you see go and succeed and you said that I am different than that kind of a person. Yes its more co-relations so I think fairly early on I didn't even applied to some of these companies even if they were day one. I said I don't have the style and personality to go and succeed there, my style is a little more grounded, little more data oriented less flam being so I do advocate to people I think we tend to in campuses make decisions primarily based on glamour and based on rankings I do advocate a slightly stronger fit element if you can into campus decision making that's I think one thing I would do. The second thing I would kind of try to change around which was in hindsight for me also, but I think I lucked out with strong mentors and I didn't make those poor choices but at the first five ten years out of college too much of our assessment of how well our career is going is based on comparing with others who passed out with us. I mean so you know we both passed out of the same B school that guy is in grade 5 I am in grade 4 that guy has a Mercedes with air-conditioning and I don't have and too much of our assessment of how well our career goes is based on comparing versus those who are passed out and I think the hindsight for me and what I have tried out to write in the book was evaluate how well your career is going based on how much you are learning? Do not evaluate how well your career is going based on visible markers versus others if your learning is growing your earning will grow, I always say manage your career for learning, earning follows, if you manage your career for earning neither comes so I think I would also say let's change the markers of how we evaluate? And out of B-School for 10 years we tend to be very comparative in our approach. And based on superficial data, you go to somebody's house for the party and you say oh shit this guy is doing better than me in my career.

DJ: Any nuggets for professionals in midlife let's say 40+ or minus, any insights on dealing with the anxieties during midlife? What have you learnt?

CV: Somebody was asking me I wrote a lot in the book, what you are going to do in the first half? And they said when are you going to write a book on what does it take to succeed in a second half? And I said I have to still succeed in my second half to write that book. I think for me the key of the second half, if you are still focused on how do I succeed? I think you start to minimize the chance of your own success, in the second half you just start to say how do I get others to succeed? How do I get my company to succeed? How do I get the business to succeed? And how do I leverage all that I have learnt to get others to succeed and the company to succeed? I think you start to become a lot more effective and a lot more productive and I think that willingness to subordinate your success for the success of the ecosystem and others is what I think helps you succeed so it is not a means it is not a social service I am advocating it is actually a means to succeeding is to understand that in the second half your success is based on the success of echo system. We succeed as individuals or as a small microcosm in the first half but we succeed in very macro echo systems in the second half and if we bring that mindset and say that's what I am trying to make work I think the chance of success goes off.

DJ: In summary Playing to Potential

CV: The first think I would leave the listeners with is to say that you can grow your potential itself your potential is not finite it is infinite and if you actually focus on growing your potential as I like to say you get what you deserve are you focusing on the getting or are you focusing on what you are deserving? If you focus more and more on deserving more if you focus on growing your potential you will be very well off, I think that's the first and the important message I would give and the second is as I like the word play because I think we do tend to get a little serious about our careers, and in the process we neither enjoy the journey nor do we achieve the success that we could at the end of the day no destination is ever final as all of us have realised in life and it's a clique but you are going to enjoy the journey and I like the play hence, to say let's also enjoy the journey maybe we will achieve more, maybe we will achieve less so be it. But if you have enjoyed the journey you have achieved a lot.

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) Learning/Earning - I really liked the emphasis on learning at various points in the conversation. He brings it up in the context of TMRR; He talks about participating in large Learning cycles, he talks about it in the context of considering a transition. The key takeaway for me here is that we are better off building our individual balance sheet over time rather income which is a myopic metric
- 2) Distinction between Being and Doing and what he says about Impact of Life on Work – I do think we lead one life and over time I feel Leadership is also about who we are being at home, with our family members, with the community around us rather than just doing a bunch of things at work; That distinction was also quite interesting and reinforcing
- 3) Helping others succeed - This reminds of research by Wharton Professor, Adam Grant in the context of his book – Give and Take. He divides up the world into Givers, Takers and Matchers. He then goes on to say that people at the top of the pile are often givers but what distinguishes them is that they give in a strategic way. He calls it Otherish which is a combination of being oriented towards others but also keeping your priorities in mind. You might notice that your momentum in

the first half of career doesn't really shift due to the giving but I have noticed that often the difference shows up in the second half of your career when a lot more of your success is dependent on the people related competencies and how much trust the ecosystem around you has in your intent and capabilities.

Thank you for listening. My next guest is Roopa Kudva (RK), Head of Omidyar Network Advisors India. We spoke about her initial years in Assam and Meghalaya, her journey to IIMA after the admissions process twice, her growth at CRISIL, the transition to Omidyar Network and more.

RK: "For me the bigger transition was the transition to the chief rating officer and the chief rating officer is the business leader of the rating business which at that time was the largest business in Crisil and that transition for the first time put me in charge of what was the most important business of the company at that point in time but more importantly it was challenging because I was chosen over my peers to do the job so how do you really move up to that level and then learn to work collaboratively and successfully with peers who you have considered your equals for many years, so I think that was I think a big learning for me and I think in that transition I learnt a few things which were very different"

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End of transcription

Nugget from Anu Madgavkar that is referenced: [Navigating your career](#).

Nugget from Viren Rasquinha that is referenced: [Building the Grit muscle](#).

Nugget from Meher Pudumjee that is referenced: [Music and Leadership](#).

Nugget from Roopa Kudva that is referenced: [Transitioning to a General Management role](#).

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Mentorship: As we go through our journeys, it is critical to learn from mentors who can guide us, inspire us and push us towards our potential. Leaders share how they have thought about the notion of a Personal Board of Advisors and have benefited from it through their journey. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Views on Success: Leaders talk about how they have recalibrated the notion of what success means to them. This is often a moving target and one has to constantly evolve it as we go through our respective journeys. They also discuss how this thinking has helped them make a more robust “where to go” decision when they were at an inflection point. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Early career: We live in a world of abundance of choices and that can be disconcerting and paralyzing. Leaders across fields talk about how individuals should think about some of their early career moves including the very first job that they need to think of when they graduate from an educational institution. 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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Chandramouli Venkatesan - Nuggets

- 28.00 Chandramouli Venkatesan - The Full Conversation
- 28.01 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Genesis of the book - CATALYST
- 28.02 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Turbocharging your growth - TMRR
- 28.03 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Raising the game when it matters
- 28.04 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Playing the 1st half to win in the 2nd half
- 28.05 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Picking mentors thoughtfully
- 28.06 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Decoupling quitting & joining decisions
- 28.07 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Evolving views on the notion of success

- 28.08 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Impact of Life on Work
- 28.09 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Cultivating "Lodestar" values
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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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