



Guest

Deepa Malik is a Silver Medallist at Paralympic Games (Rio 2016), an Arjuna Awardee (2012) and a Padma Shree Awardee (2017). She has won 58 National and 18 International medals (and counting) in her sporting career that started at the age of 36. She is paraplegic and was compelled to spend the rest of her life on a wheelchair after choosing to undergo a crucial surgery in 1999. This happened around the same time when her husband was fighting the Kargil War.

In our conversation, we spoke about her formative years in the Armed Forces and how that moulded her attitudes and approach to life. We also spoke about some of the key choices she made at pivotal points through her journey (including the decision to go for a surgery that would offer a high chance of survival but would confine her to the wheel chair). We also spoke about her approach towards excellence and how she has trained and gone onto win all that she has.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 32nd conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. A series of reflective conversations across three broad themes – Leadership, Transitions and Careers.

I am your host Deepak Jayaraman. I am an Executive Coach and I help leaders and organizations play to their potential by engaging with them during periods of high stakes transition. The work I do falls in 3 broad buckets.

- 1) Enabling leaders transition to the next level in the context of a new role (CXO to CEO, Partner to Director in a Consulting organization or related)
- 2) Leadership Transition in a company – New CEO is brought in from a different company or geography, or an entrepreneur hires a senior leader during Scale up; I am often the insurance policy in those situations helping avoid hairline cracks become fractures.
- 3) Individual Career transition where people are figuring out what next and are looking for a structured approach to discovering and landing into the next orbit.

You could visit transitioninsight.com for more details.

The guest this time is Deepa Malik, a lady who symbolises the phrase “Ability beyond Disability” in every sense of the word. She is a Silver Medallist at the Rio Paralympics (making first ever woman to win a medal in the Paralympics from India). She has won 58 National and 18 International medals in her sporting career that started at the age of 36, a time when most sportsmen would be retiring from the sport. She is paraplegic and has braved 183 stitches between her shoulder blades and three spinal tumour surgeries in the past 14 years. She was awarded the Arjuna Award in 2012 and Padma Shri in 2017.

In this conversation, we talk about her journey, the choices she has made and the mindset with which she has gone about accomplishing all that she has.

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, Google's Podcast Player, Stitcher, Saavn or any of the other podcast apps that are out there. Without further ado, over to my conversation with Deepa.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Talk a little bit about how you spend your time today? Talk to us about what you do? And why you do what you do?

Deepa Malik (DM): I think the time management quality has been my biggest strength and I am very proud of it. Because it was inculcated as a very strong virtue it was definitely a very strong part of our upbringing from our FAUJI father, but even if you keep the army bit aside even as a person I saw my father being very disciplined and very punctual and very time management oriented kind of a person he taught us the art and that's why me and my brother we both are doing very well in our respective areas, I think that quality inculcated I feel very very grateful for that and this was one virtue, which helped me overcome my disability challenges, because when you have chest below paralysis and if you have to time your food and take your water intake because your bladder and your bowel sensations are challenged and you don't feel them and anything that I do from this body requires, definitely a little more time than a regular person or if I say an abled body person, everything has to be timed and what I do in a day well of course each day is not really same, now a days it is because I am aggressively training for upcoming Para Asian games we are just two and a half months to go so definitely the life is very disciplined as far as the training hours are concerned but a lot of my time goes in, I am a home maker so managing the home the cleanliness in the house, what has to be cooked and my diet has to be very closely manoeuvred especially during the training time, so I have to give those instructions, act like a lot of seminars, interviews like these, there are inspirational sessions that I take sometimes it dedicated in guiding and counselling people in various disabilities, I go through my emails and one by one start answering them so there's a lot that has to be done during a day and honestly one GEDI is important and when I say GEDI that means I have to have to step out and even if it is a very short drive I drive my car or my motor cycle even if I have to go and buy a packet of bread I step out once a day.

DJ: How people's formative years shape them? In your case if you were to say what are the two three things that have really shaped you and your attitudes to life?

DM: I feel that when you are young and you are impressionable, whatever virtues are imbibed in you they go a long way and I always say that your team is never what you want them to be, it is who you are and my father always led with examples so did my mother so we had role models within the house, Army upbringing and the qualities, first of course like I said time management, the punctuality, because there is always an organised time table and duty is assigned a day ahead, you know what is going to happen tomorrow, so the preparation for tomorrow, that has come in very handy, even if I align it to my sports training or I align it to my management of paralysis so if I have worked and planned my day one day ahead I am stressed free because I am prepared for my next day, so this is one quality and the major one is contingency planning, if plan A fails, how to quickly switch to plan B? so when you are not dependent on one plan you definitely don't give up on life, you immediately open

the next door and you walk you through that and you start working on your plan B and there's always a very self-motivated, very self-confident fearless attitude that army gives you because you are always prepared for the unseen, whether it's a war like situation or you are dealing with ammunition, you are training for a war like training it's a very accident prone job and if you really look at it your life is always at stake, so you are prepared for the accidents and I think that is something which helped me prepare myself for this huge accident of losing my lower power in the limbs and moving on with the life.

DJ: You talk about Kargil, 1999 when your tumour had relapsed and you had to deal with this diagnosis amidst stories from casualties and fatalities from war talk to us about how you navigated this passage of play?

DM: I even got operated in the hospital which was a major place where all the war casualties were flown in that was referral and researched R&R Hospital in new Delhi I was referred from Jaipur to New Delhi and while I was undergoing my check-ups and the decisions of the surgeries, every hour a chopper would land and the moment we would hear the chopper the blades the noise everything would stand still for that moment and my only question in my eyes was that doctors could read was may I know if my husband is alive? So it was a very difficult time when I look back but again there is a paradox out there, the thing which scared me the most gave me the more energy to face my own loss because there were soldiers average age 25 years, somebody had lost a leg, somebodies eyes has blown off someone has got paralysed because of bullet injury in head or somebody who is perhaps going to die in sometime and I said that and each one would smile because what they had done was towards their nation. It was line of duty, it was level of patriotism, the higher the injury, the higher the love for the country and they were not cribbing about it then what reason did I have because mine was a disease, it wasn't that I chose to go there and get paralysed so that gave me innate strength at the same time it gave me the biggest fear of losing my husband because if I was going to either die on the operation table or remain chest below paralysed because by that point of time I had no clue what is going to happened to my life? And the way everybody was reacting to that news given by the doctors the general stereo typical impression given by society to me was that my life is going to end there, I am going to be home bound, I am going to be room bound I will never be able to step out and do normal things in life or perhaps here on I am going to be a liability on the family, so it was scary but yes we did good I won my battle over paralysis and my husband won the battle in the Kargil and we are moving on.

DJ: At that time I read one of the articles which said that you had a choice between living in the wheel chair or continuing to walk till the end and face possible death that was a choice to be made. Tell us about how did you think about that decision?

DM: I chose life , I think motherhood was my biggest strength, I wanted to be alive to see my children grow up because my daughters were barely 7 and 3 years old and they were very young and I think I was very possessive about my kids, I didn't want them to be brought up without my supervision and I think that became a huge strength, I will be very honest, it was purely motherhood that made me chose to live but eventually disability gave a focus to my life and it also gave a direction that if I use my education in the right spirit and all the values which have been given to me by my parents and a supportive in laws so I could probably put all this together and make a difference and am glad I was able to do that to an extent, though there are miles to go before I sleep and miles to go before I sleep.

DJ: How did you take stock of life and how did you recalibrate what you wanted to get out of life?

DM: Initially it was just a learning new body and the new life tricks, how to transfer, how to sit, how to eat, how to change a diaper, how to do Catheterization, if you end up with constipation, how to take enema at home, the nursing, the physio and the continued maintenance of the body, adapting it as a

lifestyle to be honest and not just being treated like a patient throughout so we all had to take charge, children had to learn, husband had to learn we had to deal with our marital confusions, because this was the new body and of course we were a different couple earlier and we had to be a different couple later the children had a different looking mother so they had to relate to her and my immediate family had to be very cautious in drafting lines and saying things because they were extra cautious that something they would said should not have a double meaning or it should not come across as something said in a negative manner so there was a lot of home work that we all had to do, when you said calibrate of course we chose to be happy I think the key point and the code word was happiness and that's why even the foundation that we have chosen to run, me and my elder daughter we call it Wheeling Happiness so we decided there will be no melodrama, so the calibration rule was happiness and zero melodrama so we stop seeing those stereo typical Hindi movies where disabilities is always shown as sadness and we started looking for the fun element to be brought into it and I think the fun element could only come in because we had certain hobbies, I love to be a biker, I love to drive cars, I loved outdoor activities, I love cooking, so all these passions and hobbies came together to calibrate and reset the life.

DJ: For people who are going through the near-death experiences, what are the two three pieces of wisdom you want to share with for them to have the courage to sail through those situations, what have you learnt?

DM: I think I have learnt that life is the only festival, that can be celebrated every day, you don't have to wait for dates, time, engagements, create time to do that, I think every day should be celebrated and the other experience that I felt or I personally decided or you may call it a resolution that I made to myself, when I was walking to the operation theatre because I chose to do that, I did not wanted to be wheeled or put on a stretcher and taken and then I took the last set of stairs I ever took in R&R Hospital I was actually looking at my feet and realising that I have legs. How many times we stand up in front of a mirror and say oh I have hands, I have eyes, oh my god I do have feet on which I can walk, we never really take time to count our blessings and one thing I have learnt is I look for happiness one, I look for positivity two, and three I take everything in my way as a blessing and I celebrate it.

I don't take anything for granted anymore and I have stopped postponing things in my life, if I have something on my wish list I try to act on it as soon as possible or maybe I can put it in a way that I don't wait for things to happen, I initiate the change. I take initiatives now, I don't wait.

DJ: Given your situation, how do you strike the balance between being seen as a regular person leading a regular life and an individual who is different from the rest the reason I ask is diversity and inclusion sometimes are two sides of the same coin so how do you think about those two, In terms of being just like anyone else versus being someone who is distinct from the rest, how do you process that?

DM: I think I have come to learn a lesson in life that people will look at you the way you look at yourself, as long as I was treating myself as a patient or as somebody who was disabled, or have a sad persona around me or still despair losing legs and not moved on I was looked upon like that but today I took charge of my situation, I said no I am going to be as normal, well I never said that I am abnormal, and actually there is nothing that I don't do which people with all functions intact in their body do, I drive, I swim, I play, I watch movies, I listen to music, I cook, I am a mother, I am a wife, I am a home maker and I write some poetry, I have hobbies, I travel so there is nothing really different and that's what I crusade for I call myself a person on a mission called and ability beyond disability, who actually advocates that the differences are I think just a matter of thought and not matter of action, if you really take charge and do it as casually people also take it that way because initially I have always realised that when somebody meets up. Initially when I recently got paralysed and people saw the

change from a walking Deepa to a severely disabled Deepa, with so many medical challenges and body challenges and at the same time I think generally the Indian society is used to and understands that we are culturally not a very sensitised society we do not have the kind of infrastructure and inclusion that is there outside India or, so we as a society in general do not accept disability so easily or we are not knowledgeable enough to understand that yes we have a way to cope up and live normally, inclusively with the challenges in the body also, even if you see it mythologically or anything, they its “*Bure Karmo kaa fal hai*” there is always a negative connotation attached to it, it is never taken as part of life.

DJ: So you deserve it kind of an approach right?

DM: Yes, so there's a lot of guilt which is been imposed on you that there is something wrong that you have done to deserve this, so to deal with a society which used to these thoughts its definitely changing now with the current generation but I am two decades old on the chair so if I take you twenty years back, because with the internet coming in, with the phones, with WhatsApp with these positive stories floating around and a lot of media activity around changes and positive thinking and like the recording that we are doing now the thought process is changing and corporates have come in with their MNC policies of inclusivity and diversity, so overall the work culture and the thought culture is changing but when I had got paralysed, I faced all this and I think the onus laid upon me to make the other person comfortable rather than the other person trying to make me feel comfortable so once they saw that I was alright with the chair and I was happy within my space then they would let their guards down and speak to me normally and include me, they would not talk about fashion, Sari shopping because I could no longer wear a Sari so they would delete the Sari talks not realising that I would still like to talk about it I would probably cherish some really good memories about wearing Saris or at least updating my information as to what is the latest fashion being a fashionable women myself but slowly and steadily a time came and I was a show stopper on the ramp shows, so this change of attitude like first I said the people will look at you the way you look at yourself so you have to create an aura around you, you have to help people around you, so it comes to the communications skills, the way you learn soft skills in any business environment, I think this is also a learning like that and a person who suffers with any kind of physical challenge can help the other person who does not understand, it's not their fault, because it is not as common, this is a unique situation, which is not universally Omni-present so obviously you don't expect everybody to understand it the way you do, you can help them understand so that's what I do, I make people understand my situation and I also make them understand that I am alright with it, and the moment they realised that, if I am OK with it, they are OK with it.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. This segment of the conversation reminds me of my conversation with Meher Pudumjee (MP) (Chairperson – Thermax) who spoke about how she and her mother dealt with the loss of her father and brother in quick succession.

MP: *“With my father, of course it was a shock but in a way, it was sword hanging over his head because he smoked and he had a bypass surgery he had a stent and so it was like anytime, with my brother, why god why have you chosen my brother? He is all of 25 and I was very angry with god, with the world and I have to say, I don't know how my mother is such a huge pillar of strength but she did a lot of reading on death and she went to Vipassana after Dad died, after Kurush died and she was really there in terms of saying you can't ever say why me just look around you and truly if we looked around us, you have to say thank you god, the gratitude is far more than, why did you pick me?”*

DJ: This also reminds of what Sheryl Sandberg says in the context of how she coped with her husband Dave Goldberg's sudden death. She talks about avoiding 3Ps when we are hit with shocks

- Personalization (which is why me?)
- Permanence (which is thinking that things are doomed forever)
- Pervasiveness (everything around me is ruined)

I guess easier said than done but back to Deepa Malik's journey, the notion of taking it one day at a time and consistently choosing happiness over melodrama indeed does wonders. Now let's get back to my conversation with Deepa Malik.

DJ: How you thought about picking the next mountain to climb metaphorically speaking. How do you set the next milestones?

DM: I was just tired of that questions, "*Tabiyat Kaisi hai?*" when are you going to be alright? So I really didn't know that what has everybody waiting for? This is the permanent situation, this has become part of my life and what is the definition of *Achchhi Tabiyat*? Physically it's going to be a wheel chair, emotionally I am alright with it, my family has accepted it we have found a way to work around the chair and the disability but like I said, commonly people don't know or people are not used to it, so how do I declare this whole happy state of mind and or even if not happy let me call it accepted state of mind where I have come into acceptance and I have adapted to the change, this skill to be part of this change and move on in life, so I started tapping on all my potentials and hobbies and I started thinking of what can I do to declare to the world that my life is alright on a chair and I am no longer of patient please start treating me like a person and in that quest my first of course first and foremost was financial stability because I am tired of being called a financial liability on the family, first step was to turn a restaurateur a lot of learning went into that, I didn't know how to take a loan from the bank I had absolutely no clue how to run a business but I was open to asking for help and that's when I tell everybody, the issues I see nowadays is a lot of egos I know it all attitude or I just have to press a couple of buttons and Google baba is going to tell me everything, I think first-hand experience and interaction, human to human interface teaches you much more than this mechanical, of course it's good to get educated but it's also very important to learn it practically. I had no hotel management background, I had no MBA skills.

DJ: And how did you pick running a restaurant, out of curiosity off the various things you could do?

DM: I think that was the first thing which came naturally to a housewife who knew cooking and who loved cooking and I also found an opportunity there, because the Ahmednagar area the pocket in which we were living had no home delivery counter and we had a lot of army officers as students over there and it is also an industrial kind of a town and a lot of education there so I felt that around the army area we were missing home delivery counters and young officers wanted food to be door delivered so that they could, they didn't have to get ready go to the officers mess wait for their turn to come as junior officers and then there were couple of retired cooks who were also looking for an opportunity to set up something, so in one corner of the farm house and in that little farm land we put a shade and a small kitchen and we employed the underprivileged kids of the mess the boys who were not able to pursue their education, so it became like a project which was interdependent and the cooks got a job, I got something to do, the people around got a home delivery counter and these young boys who were bartered by giving them a place of stay cloths and books and during the day they had to pursue their education and in the evening they had to deliver these packets and from this small home delivery counter to a small restaurant to an absolutely flourishing catering business, seven years it was amazing and the point came when I was earning more than my husband, I was not a liability but

I was giving a job opportunity to at least 20 staff members of my restaurant, so that was a first step and once I found that stability financially and I did not live on the guilt of eating into the family money to do what I wanted to do I started travelling, I started looking for opportunities, turn a biker raised sponsorships, learnt internet, started writing emails and finally I did get that but my doctors told me that I need better rehabilitation, I needed to strengthen my upper body to be able to balance this whole body and have this strength to create a record which I thought people will only listen to me and my voice will only be heard if I do something different and a women went chest below paralysis, when she will ride a bike a certain distance, creating a record, probably her voice will be heard and that will leave an impact on the society it was personal as well as there was a goal which was value addition and to do that I started doing hydro therapy, which meant I had to exercise in water and I realised that this body was not drowning rather swimming and there it is where a Para swimmer came out and swimming also became a journey.

DJ: When did this quest for the Olympic start?

DM: I think that was the habit of doing the job properly with full dedication and reaching the hundred percent mark because that is what we have been taught that a real person or a real hero is when you can do the task that you have under taken to the best of your capacity and to the highest level of performance so I guess when I turned to a biker I created a world record, when I become a rallyist in a car driver I created a world record, when I became a swimmer I created a world record, so if I had become a sports women and an athlete a thrower I could not end my journey without reaching a top-most sports arena and winning there. It's just a pursuit of excellence and excelling over excellence I think that is what the main reason maybe was.

DJ: I am also curious about the sport people pick to excel so off the various things whether it's swimming or let's say short put, how did you zero in on short put as the sport that you will compete in at the Olympics?

DM: You will be surprised beggars can't be choosers, so if I had to be at London Para Olympics in 2012 for which I was training I had to be a javelin thrower because that was the only event in my disability category in that particular area unfortunately I could not make it to London Para Olympics but since I was practicing it I created an Asian record which I still hold in javelin throw I became Asia ranking one and I picked up an Asian medal in 2014 in javelin throw becoming world number two in my category and I was very sure that's going to be javelin thereafter but to my horror and to my surprise in 2015 when the event list for Rio Para Olympics came out the only event I had in my category was shot put and again it will be surprised to know that the only even in my category in 2020 in Japan-Tokyo is going to be Discus, so we don't chose the only thing we chose is do we want to be at that level? Playing in this particular competition? If you want to do that you have to learn the skill and that has been the key I have always been willing to learn, I always say that even when I today go to the grounds I go there to learn to train in spite of having 68 national gold's and 21 international medals including the ones from Asian games Para Olympics, world championships, common wealth games, I still say that I am going to learn.

DJ: Which of these medals are you the proudest of? The one which stands out the most.

DM: Definitely people would think that it is the Rio Para Olympics medal which of course I am very very proud of because that has created history for the entire nation, we were starving for the medal from a female in Para athletics or Para sports because my medal won at Para Olympics is the first ever across any sport, it is special but the best one was 2010 Asian games medal for me which was a bronze that was the game first ever won by an female athlete the first Asian games medal. Why it is special because that medal turned me into a sports activist that medal gave me the capacity to stand up and

demand at par treatment because similar medal from Asian games, the able bodied were getting, a lot of recognitions, awards, Cash awards and with this medal in my hand, I had got ticket to raise a voice for the Para sports equal treatment and when I did that I did started making a proper report and filing it to bureaucrats, to politicians demanding at par treatment and cash awards and also requesting for future training programs because able bodied were inducting to the training programs post their performances in Asian games toward the London opens, so this is the very special medal and thank to this medal and all the activity around it I became the member in the five year planning commission, as a working group member from the HRD division of sports ministry, rooting some policies for disability sports so it was a huge turning point.

DJ: What's been your approach to excellence? What has been your learning in terms of excelling at the highest levels?

DM: I think the dedicated focus, perseverance, continuous training, consistency is the key I guess with focus, I used to think that they are very clichéd, very stereo types dictionary terms which have been often used to form quotations, but you pick up any success story you will see there is a very strong element of self-belief, self-discipline, focus, dedicated consistent hard work because there is definitely no short cut to success, if you want to be the winner, you have to go through these words, when they are totally imbibed in your system.

DJ: Talk to us about how your mind worked before you're threw the silver medal winning throw?

DM: You will be very surprised the person who was throwing the throw there was not an athlete, it was a person who was struggling to clear her name because there was the accuse of being dishonest, cheating into the selection trials I was dragged to the high court by a fellow competitor because there was the one slot for a women to represent India and I made it to that slot in the internal trial process but they said that I had cheated my way into it or I had bribed my way into it and coming from and entirely army background which is the uniform wearing people and being brought up in that very honest kind of a, dedicated kind of an environment it was a huge blow to my integrity and the hard work that I had put in at the age of 46 years going through menopause a time where I had to be actually sitting by my children and crafting their career I was, so dedicatedly, single minded struggling for representing India at the Para Olympics and the preparations were so strong that I knew I was going to get a medal home but these allegations became a different kind of a fire in me and when I was challenged that I am never going to be able to throw the distance with which I got qualified with the main selection so my whole focus was that if I have to repeat that performance, I repeated that performance in any case that I was in a medal position so it had become a two way journey as an athlete and as an individual who wanted to prove a point of integrity, the other thing was definitely I say that your preparations tell you where you stand and they will leave with the level of confidence, so if you have trained well and you have been able to retain the calmness in your mind, I had to learn to erase the outside noises I would probably get distracted with because there was the bigul blowing, people clapping there is a gunshot, because simultaneously a lot of events go on in the same arena you have the start burst for races, you have people cheering so this is something that I had learn to block and I give a lot of credit to my mental trainers who worked on me.

DJ: What differentiates the great coaches from the good one? What does it take from them to get the best of an athlete or a CEO?

DM: Personally, in my case you will be surprised that I hardly had a coach, or I probably failed to have a person who would understand my body, it's so severely disabled that the stereo typical style of teaching a person just not work with me because I have spasticity and the body does not react continuously in the same way the messages from the brain does not get passed the neurons are

damaged, so this time I chose to work with a biomechanics gym trainer and worked more on the diet, the psychology and the muscle strengthening and repetitive practice to brain to be able to carry the message to my particular part of the muscle that needs to be used so I think that worked in my favour and a lot of mental training I worked on because psychologically I was under a lot of pressure the equipment is heavier the age is against me and I will never be able to do it because there is a certain age of doing it, so I had to work on myself but still not taking away the fact that everybody needs a coach I would feel and if we talk in terms of a team leader or a CEO, I think people who can keep the team motivated there has to be a Jeff and Mutt theory there it cannot be always putting the other person down, I think that is something which should be a standard rule for parenting also, that's how we always read about good parenting that rather than picking up the negatives or conveying it in a negative connotation, is you are saying that you did not throw well you say in next one you will throw better I think that approach makes a person more motivated a good coach or a good CEO is someone who can motivate his team or the student in a way that the person is happy coming back to the training ground the next day, it should be a happy space where the person feels very very motivated to work and that the reason I had to change coaches and finally not having one during my journey for the Rio Para Olympics because I was not getting that self-motivation going through then so I erased all that, I chose a person who could actually make me believe that I can do it.

DJ: What have you discovered about sort of power of the mind in these situations? What do these mental trainers do?

DM: I think in my case I was not believing in myself which is again there is a lot of metaphysical consider there are person who was a motivational speaker was not, so somewhere in my mental training I was told that you can do it you have the capacity to do it and I realised that it was always mind over body, you become what you think, you would become, so that self-belief was the part because somewhere I was not able to believe that I had the potential to throw a shot put which was the heavy equipment to a distance where I can place myself to the podium in Rio Para Olympic which is I think the major thing because my strength was telling me I can my muscle training and the kind of weight I was lifting in the gym or the endurance I had during the throw practice that was clearly saying that I am going to do it but my mind was not telling me that I am going to do it so it was very important for me to know that I will be able to do it.

DJ: How do mental trainers in still that belief, what do they do to give you that belief?

DM: I think it just though, on a lighter side my mental trainer told me she says Deepa there is a typical women and a middle class house wife mentality working in you just because you have paid me you want to utilise that knowledge, so it was a *Paisa vasool* theory just because you had paid me a lot you are following it, how you buy a piece of clothing or a shoe and you *Ragdo* it till the end *Jabtak bilkul nahi fat jayega mai isko use karungi* so it is a simple theory that I knew it all I am 46 years old educated women from an educated background, I absolutely knew whatever she has to tell me but just because I paid her to do that I stuck by it to utilise it, so what is it that the knowledge is there but we are not willing to utilise it and that was the only difference I think.

DJ: What have you learnt about resilience especially during tough times given how you have moved mountains?

DM: I think the biggest help that can come from in maintaining resilience or facing a particular situation is to automatically shift into the solution finding game rather than harping on the problem so that's what I do whenever I face challenge I immediately start looking for a solution how to go about it? And solution finding will again come back to learning, learning about the situation or I think in other words a challenge is change because you want to happen a thing in a certain way and it doesn't so

which automatically says that there is a change, how good are you in adapting to a change, how flexible you are to quickly mould yourself into the situation I think that automatically sets the bar of your resilience, if you are rigid you are not adapting to the change you are not willing to learn about the change, you don't want to find the solution to tackle with the situation then where will the resilience come from? I think I am very quick to find solutions or alternatives so it I think goes back to the fact that, do you have the contingency planning? Which I think reflects the same as finding a solution.

DJ: What have you learnt about building and managing a team to achieve your objectives?

DM: I think a good team is the one which has the common goal, it should not be like they are in it because it is Deepa's dream, they have to dream the same dream, and if you have the team which is dreaming with you then you are in the right set of people it just doesn't have to be your journey they have to be an equal part of that journey, take equal responsibility of that journey and then probably you have the right team in your side and I was been very fortunate that when I wanted to be a biker the people who were supporting me, who were working with me or who were guiding me really wanted me to be on that bike, they really wanted me to do that so similarly when I started my journey and my struggle to be a rallyist those who joined hands ensured I took the flag off so then it becomes the right team. So firstly you have to identify likeminded people, second try and look for positive attitude people because people who are positive in their outlook will be a happy persona will be the person who has the art of gratitude and the moment you have an art of gratitude you are somebody who knows how to count your blessings so I think if you can identify these little qualities in somebody or inculcate these qualities in somebody by good communication and clear communication making them see things the way you see things then you are in the right kind of a team.

DJ: How do you think about your goals and aspirations in the future?

DM: I have always had a plan I have always set myself another bench mark, so while I am working hard for this I don't leave myself in empty space, I immediately have my next target on line that also keeps me going I guess and it helps me raise my bar each time for now it is Asian games and post that I am very clear that I have to start working at my foundation wheeling happiness because it's time to spread the light, pass on the and have more Deepa's coming up that's what we need there is immense talent out there that needs to be nurtured that need to be brought out into the light and some guidance and if I can become the medium of change in somebody's life like people have become medium so it's time to give back now so that's the next goal I have right now like I have the Asian games to look forward to.

DJ: What is 'Wheeling happiness' is all about?

DM: It was my daughters brain child it was her initiative and my elder daughter met with an accident when she was just year and a half and due to the head injury she got Hemiplegia which is the left of the body got entirely paralysed and after that I got my tumour back so I got paralysed, so actually we are two of us who have motivated each other and done a physiotherapy together and overcome our challenges and both of us are probably the only mother daughter dual who played together in Para sports, she has also represented India and she has somehow chosen this field or probably felt the need or understood the advantages of emotional happiness, in the process of overcoming disability because she has seen it in me she has first had experienced in her own life and right now she is pursuing probably only one in India to go to the world's number one sport college university which is Loughborough University UK and she is pursuing a PhD course in disability sports psychology so she has dedicated her life to betterment of this particular sector to bring hope to the life of people and become a medium to create and including and accessible India and not just physically and emotionally

and mentally also sensitise people so we do a lot of counselling sessions, we encourage people support them to pursue their hobbies because we feel that if a person is first happy then that person will be able to deliver learn adapt in a better way if you are already in a sad space how do you expect that person to be motivated enough to come out of that and become somebody who can achieve or somebody who can work or somebody who can being out there in the world doing things for him or herself so that's how we call it wheeling happiness, we try and find their sources of happiness.

DJ: And how do you do that if I may ask?

DM: We do a lot of seminars, we do a lot of interactive sessions, we do a lot of updating through our pages and then a lot of people connect to us for example if someone wants to learn driving, because they have seen me driving it's like leading with an example and asking people for follow, pursue, it's a very small initiative but I am very happy and proud that Devika has won the queen's young leader award for it in Buckingham palace and she is currently working very closely with the common wealth youth counsel while she is there in England, she recently became the voice of the youth at the common wealth government head's meeting which was opened in Buckingham palace this March and she made that appeal to the 53 government heads for having these whole planet little more inclusive and give equal opportunities, so we are also fighting for the rights we are helping people, with sports, wheel chair or some kind of supplements or sports equipment or if somebody wants to work out of home so helping them to learn the computer skill and getting them a laptop so whatever way they can be emotionally happy we are trying to work at that.

DJ: What about you has enabled you to come this far and achieve so much?

DM: I always say that there is only one disease that I suffer from and that is happiness to be able to remain happy in whatever circumstances I was has left me sane enough to plan to look around for opportunities because I think a sad person is a closed mind so the happy hormones had worked for me.

DJ: And what's the secret behind staying happy through these situations?

DM: I think look at the positive sides of things make the best of what I have had and worked hard to best of my capacity.

DJ: In summary what advice you would give the listeners about Play to Potential.

DM: It is very very important to be honest to yourself, I love playing guitar but you never really pick it up and play, I want to write a book but you never made notes, how will you ever do it? So I think the best way to find your potential and to reach your optimum is to be honest to yourself if you set a goal for yourself then honestly work towards it, no short cuts, and no postponements no cheating to yourself because excellence will only come when you have very honestly put your best foot forward.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

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

1) Happiness is a choice and has nothing to do with your situation in life. It was interesting to hear Deepa say that the way people treated her was a function of how she looked at herself. Given what she has been through, if she can choose happiness over melodrama, am sure all of us can

2) Actions rewire the identity - Sometimes, we think that when we are hit with a shock we can think our way into our new identity but I do believe that we act our way into our new self. It is fascinating to see Deepa move on to set up a catering business, then car rallies, then swimming and eventually compete in the Olympics. It is never a sling shot but a series of small consistent steps that often leads to extraordinary outcomes.

3) She uses the term dedicated consistent hard work. This reminded me of a distinction I came across recently. It was at the Farnam Street Blog run by Shane Parrish. He talks about the difference between Speed and Velocity. He says Speed is Distance divided by time, Velocity is Displacement by time. The key difference is that you could cover a lot of distance by spinning around in circles but not going anywhere. Displacement is about consistently making efforts in a certain direction and making them count. And when you add these baby steps over a period of time, suddenly these people start operating at a different level.

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I look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversations of the playtopotential podcast.

End of transcription

Nugget from Meher Pudumjee that is referenced: [Dealing with shocks](#).

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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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Deepa Malik - Nuggets

- 32.00 Deepa Malik - The Full Conversation
- 32.01 Deepa Malik - Early formative years
- 32.02 Deepa Malik - Dealing with two possible fatalities
- 32.03 Deepa Malik - Rebounding from a near-death event
- 32.04 Deepa Malik - Getting people comfortable with the context
- 32.05 Deepa Malik - Picking the first "mountain" to climb
- 32.06 Deepa Malik - Training for the Olympics
- 32.07 Deepa Malik - Perspectives on Excellence
- 32.08 Deepa Malik - Picking an effective Coach
- 32.09 Deepa Malik - Building resilience
- 32.10 Deepa Malik - About Wheeling Happiness Foundation
- 32.11 Deepa Malik - 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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