



Guest

Arun Maira is a former member of the Planning Commission of India and former Chairman of BCG India. He had a distinguished career in Tata Motors (then called TELCO) and rose to be on the Board of the company. He then had to relocate to the US due to a personal situation and had to reinvent himself at 45. He has written several books, the most recent one being “Listening for well-being: Conversations with people not like us”.

In our conversation, we discuss some of his key transitions post Tata Motors to the world of Advisory Services. We talk about how he went about making some of those choices and settled into the new context. We also deep-dive into his book on Listening and discuss its impact on various domains. We talk about the art of asking deeper questions, how we could steer through listening, how we can have tough conversations and give hard feedback by listening, the trade-off between richness and reach of conversations and more.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 34th conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast, a series of reflecting conversations with leaders across disciplines on topics around Leadership, Transitions and Careers. I am Deepak Jayaraman, your host and curator of the podcast. I am an Executive Coach and work with leaders during high stakes transition –whether it is a role transition, leadership transition in a company or a career transition in an individual’s life.

I believe that just like businesses need to be coherent about their answers to “where to play and how to win”, we all need to be thoughtful about our responses to the 2 questions “where to go and how to grow”. This podcast is an attempt at exploring how some leaders across domains have grappled with these two questions as they have gone on their respective journeys.

My guest this time is Arun Maira, Former Chairman of Boston Consulting Group in India and former member of Planning Commission of India. We spoke about his journey in Tata Motors where he rose to get to the Board of the company but suddenly had to move to the US to take care of his daughter’s health situation. He talks about how he transitioned from the world of Business Leadership to becoming a Trusted Advisor to leading CEOs and Board Members. We also spent time exploring the various insights from his book “Listening for well-being – Conversations with people not like us”. We speak about how in a post-truth world that is getting noisier and noisier, how it is even more critical for us to listen to different perspectives. We also end up discussing how listening can be used as a vehicle for giving tough feedback, how it connects to the concepts in Thinking Fast and Slow by Dan Kahneman, the Art of asking good questions and much much more.

A quick thought on how you could consume the podcast. If you want to listen offline during a car-ride, plane travel, gym session or morning walk, you might want to use one of the popular podcast apps out there (Google and Apple have their podcast players, Spotify, Saavn, Stitcher and so on). If

you are keen to get insights by them across speakers I would urge you to visit the Curated Playlists section of the website – playtopotential.com. If you want to be informed when I upload new content, you could sign up on the website. You have my word that you will receive less than 2 emails a month and your data will not be shared with any external organization.

Without further ado, over to my conversation with Arun Maira.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I wanted to talk to you about the book listening for wellbeing conversations with people not like us before we get talking about the book. Why did you write the book? What was the insight that you wanted to share that was new and different, because enough been written about listening, I am curious about why you felt the need to write this book and why now?

Arun Miara (AM): I became aware that I was not listening deeply to things that I should and that there was too little listening amongst people by my grandson and Viren who lives in the US my son's son he now is 13, he was 5 then and he came visiting us here in Gurugram so I took him to show Delhi and show him India country of his grandfather and father and we were driving in Lodhi road area where he was sitting in the back with his mother and my son and I in the front seat and we stopped at couple of these traffic lights in Lodhi road where a lot of these beggars are around and while I was happily chatting with my son in the front this little voice piped up at the back and said "Mum, the lady was knocking and no one answered her" so she said "Which lady was Knocking?" he said "there, when we stopped" the lady was knocking on the window and you didn't answer and no one answered her, and you know there was the knocking there and we didn't even hear the knock and no one answered her, so and then he carried on and said "Mum, why do this people have to do everything on the street?" so she said "What?", he said "Mom, they are eating on the street, cooking on the street, they are sleeping on the street, they are even pooping on the street, Mom why?" so she said "Viren we are very lucky people we live in the United States it's a rich country we have a house with bedrooms and bathrooms and Kitchen so we don't need to do things on the street. They have no homes, and they are poor people you see and she is asking for money and that's why she is knocking on the window." I heard this conversation and it made me think that yes I am driving in an air conditioned car which is the benefits of industrial progress and India's growth and when I was in India before we left in let's say late 1980s, there were Ambassadors and Fiats, we drove around and there were beggars then too but they weren't air conditioned these cars and the beggars would put their hands inside the windows, because the windows had to be down, it was hot. And you had pushed them *Chhodo* or put something in their hand and you were in touch with people. We are now out of touch and I thought about this knocking on the window sound, are we really aware of the lives of people, are we listening to their stories, are we listening to their lives? So that metaphor sort of came into mind.

DJ: Give us a sense of how your pie chart of time looks today? And more importantly what you do and why you do what you do?

AM: Some of the best part of my time these days is a people who come to meet me, they have a venture in mind or they are on to a journey to do something which is very important to them and difficult and they come and talk about what they are doing and how they are succeeding and the challenges that they are having all the people that I meet today by choice are people who are not building corporations, I mean I have done many years of my self-corporation and consulting to

leaders in big corporations now it's into a more challenging world more aspirational world of people who want to make a difference to the lives of many others around them and it's not providing them products and services which they will pay for it is helping those people to earn more to produce product and services intern which will enable them to earn more as well as improve the health of people and education of people so I spend my time with wonderful people doing wonderful things and we get into very learning full discussions for me and I hope for them too on how one could make difference in such a world in an open system in which one wishes to produce the change but one is not the leader of an organization with the resources and the visibility and therefore the attraction of others do one that makes it easier to actually make the change.

DJ: Given this sort of a method of spending time, what do you say no to and what do you say yes to, I am sure there are a lot of people that are seeking placing demands on your time so what's the prioritization mechanism as you think about what you say yes to and no to?

AM: Well I also spend a fair amount of time on reading and writing and these three means time with real people doing real things as well as reading a lot about the world and how the change could be brought about in the world and such people and other stories enables me to make selections that I know I could get a lot of learning from things and books and so on so and if the person is just like one of those and quoting all those things to me I would be interested but if someone else talking from his or her own life and he is a very well informed person I can see and a read as much as the person on his own or her could do and he's coming to me after that so I find that there are people who just come to get education as they say, tell me how to do the obvious things to me than I find that in a way waste of my time, please go do your own homework or get into life and do it for two or three years then you get to the real questions then I can be a more useful coach for these people otherwise I mean go Google go read something and you will know what you are trying to take my time for?

DJ: Trying to understanding the art of asking good questions, in your experience what have you're learnt about framing the question right in eliciting thoughtful responses or navigating a certain discussion in a meaningful way?

AM: There is this what and how and the why, different ladders that people describe and the three Why's in terms of enquiry and I say, OK we look at data and so there is a lot of questions about data, where is the data? How does the data add up? So you go down that path about the data and trying to see reality through, re-organizing and adding or subtracting in the data itself and you can go down to the path also into the logic behind in the data itself. So this way it could lead to that so it comes to next level on that which is not just addition or subtractions but you go to more calculus maths and so there's a more ways to thinking about how to make sense of the data and I say fine now the data is being interpreted by a mind, the data is also collected by the people who felt that, that was good data to get so that was mind who chose which data to select, what data to select so there are minds here so there's a reasoning about mind. Why this is important data? So I learn to switch myself off the deductive track pretty quickly and to ask why you think one should be looking at this data. And then I would notice quite often that why the person thinks this data is important is the reason to probably ask the question I think is what the point of this data is? I don't think this data is important but this person is presenting all this stuff, why do you think it's important? So I am learning about another person's way of thinking and what another person gives value to? Which apparently is not what I give value to, is not my way of thinking so this is how I am 'people not like us' as I say I am listening to someone who's not like me in this situation both of us could be let's say in BCG or in world of business and BCG they are people like us, so we have a way of thinking and things we value and the data that we consider as important which is similar and when you come to people who we consider ill-educated or people who are rabid in their thinking they are not like us but they are

human beings and many of them have got PhD if you want to count that as that they have education or they have been through life very successfully in some field but they value different things and they think about the world in a different way, so then I have to ask them about more question about how they came to believe that these things are important, so learning about them, their journey how they developed, their values and their mental frames and so, that's how then I am learning at even deeper levels but in the formation of my own values I mean how did my values formed.

DJ: It is not just looking at the data but really sort of going two levels down on how they look at the data and why they look at the data.

AM: Yes and what they value?

DJ: In the book I really like the metaphor where you say listening is a bit like Yoga, where you breath out to direct the conversation, so that you are able to breath in the point of view of the other, but again as a leader sometimes you need to steer a ship in a certain direction, there are objectives to be met and stakeholders to be satisfied, how do you balance the need to steer conversation somewhere as a leader with the point you make about resisting the urge to steer. Is there a tension there?

AM: Of course there is, but I reconcile like this that if I care deeply about something, very deeply and I want that to be the driver of not just myself but of the world, some value that I care about very deeply, I can't run away from that to change that is very difficult and perhaps not necessary, I mean if my value is one in which I want to make a world better in my perspective better for other people and not just myself then I should pursue that value but I want followers to come along with me people will follow if they care for where you are going, if they care for the same thing that you care about. I would hate to be in a position where I have marched off with this great passion and commitment, thinking in my mind that this is the right thing if people will follow me and then I turn around having marched off and I find no one behind me then I am like Don Quixote is on is a little animal no one's around and then I can pretend I am a leader but there are no followers, so I must as I take off on this journey, start listening to others around myself, listening to what they care about, and if I influence them with my caring as I learnt in my days in Tatas, when you are listening to someone else there's a window given to you because they will ask you also, then only they will openly ask you after you have respected them and heard them then they might, otherwise they age because you are the boss hear you, but they are not wishing to follow you, they do not wish to follow you but they have to, so I do feel that for a leader, yes you must have something that you care about, so I say that my definition of leadership is she or he who takes the first steps towards something that she or he deeply cares about and in ways that others will wish to follow, so in that sentence with this three parts I think there some key things here, it's about something that you deeply care about, it's about taking the first steps and not waiting for others to take the steps, so you take the risk and immediately in ways that others wish to follow and to locate what others wishes are and to be even be moulded by their wishes, its ok be open to change yourself.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. A quick comment here. Listening when you are in a new context is often counter-intuitive to a lot of people that are keen to assert their power and influence by taking charge and by showing "who is the boss". But if you really are looking to drive change over the long-term, listening to build trust and a nuanced picture of what is going on is critical before you come up with the Theory of Change that will take the organization forward. Ravi

Venkatesan (RV), one of my earlier guests spoke about this when he spoke about his appointment as the Chairman of the Board at Bank of Baroda.

RV: "what you have to do in is listen intently and I did I made it very conscious effort to listen to a bunch of people retired chairman of a bank of Baroda so it helped me understand from your perspective, what I should do what the issues are? How would you handle them? And you get a certain perspective, I went and spoke to Waghul of ICICI and P.J. Nayak of Axis Bank because they had, they have been around and seen revolution of banking sector, I met a lot of our own employees and so forth, so from this you begin to piece together first the situation and then out of that emerges a theory of change which is, what interventions are really going to Make a difference and who are going to be an important alliances if you don't listen and you start to imide you are coming with the point of view you starts jumping into action right away you going to make a lot of mistakes because you hadn't built this nuance and reasonably accurate picture of the landscape"

DJ: Ensuring that we listen to a range of voices and form a nuanced picture before we move forward is critical especially when we move to a new context. Now let's get back to the conversation with Arun Maira.

DJ: The angle or the other perspective you being in listening is even during tough feedback conversations you mention in the book that, instead of giving the feedback, listen. What's the insight there? Expand on that.

AM: There is a very lovely saying that if a big tree falls in the forest and there's no one there to hear, was there a sound? So the listening is completed in the ear, in the mind of the listener so you have to prepare that ground to want to listen, to hear. So your speaking very accurately with the best of intentions that I mean in the best interest of this person but the window there has not been opened and there are many reasons that window may not be opened one of them just could be in the relationship that this person he comes in from a different world will discount whatever this person says though the person saying it with the best intention it's my feeling of difference from this person, the second comes is where this persons thinks there's something wrong with me and therefore his getting me advised that I am putting my differences anyways, there's nothing wrong with me how dare this person thinks so to get beyond this all barriers that we put up for our own, the protections so that we are not going to kicked around, I just have to allow myself to listen to this person, when I am listening to the person those barriers inside the person drops and the person dropping defences the person is enjoying listening to herself actually, because you are making the person talk and a person is listening to ourselves when you ask the questions about what the person thinks because the person himself or herself never have thought about why I think this way. Now you are listening to your own mind so I am helping people to listen to their own mind and what I find very difficult but I enjoy doing is when I am making someone else listen to their mind, I listen to why I asked that question, there must be something in me that prompted me to think that this was a good question to ask something my thinking which felt that sort of a foreign situation, so I ask this question but I am asking it in a curious way, I am not asking it and trying my best, not in a diminishing way for the other person, of course I am learning about myself too so this is what I put out in the book, and I was so please that his holiness with Dalai Lama having read the book he wrote the foreword and his foreword is so well put when he says that, listening is the first wisdom tool of Buddhism and I never knew that because we hear about the compassion and we hear about reflection and self-knowledge which he says are the second and the third wisdom tools, as he said unless you listen there's nothing new to reflect upon unless you listen, you can't understand the other person and never feel the compassion, so it's the first necessary discipline, so I link that to you asked me about Yoga, listening sound something so simple, I mean how could just by listening, the

world becomes a better place you are saying, I become a better person, such a simple thing and talking of complications of people killing each other on the streets and inching each other and on social media demolishing each other, I mean world is in a bad place. How by just something like listening could the world progressively become better and I say well Yoga is what, just breathing, it's such a simple thing you are born to breathe, the child breathes and then you are telling us please breath better more effectively, your whole body will be toned up, your mind will feel better, your heart is better, your lungs are better, your digestion is better. Very complicated systems by simple act breathing, yes we are born to do but don't do well, and similarly I am saying listening a child is a curious thing, a child is born to say a strange sound what is it all about? And we start teaching the child to put filters on. This is bad things don't listen to that person, don't talk to they got the wrong ideas and you know children do go and they are curious we say no this is bad for you so look how we create the filters the lenses in minds of children and ourselves which shut out all that is different to us.

DJ: What are your insights around having deep conversations at scale?

AM: I love what we are doing, the two of us sitting on the chair, facing each other and there is very gentle person recording our conversation so three chairs, I have mentioned in the book what Henry David Thoreau and he said you know I bulled in his cabin and I have got two chairs for having a conversation and a third chair in case it's for society so this is the third chair there beyond that he says there's just too many people and that's true, I can look you in the eye and I can see that you are listening to me so well, so I am interested also in you so we are having a deep dialogue here I think amongst ourselves but as you start getting to ten people into the room, into the same so called conversation each feels a need to speak, has the need to speak, then what other says start influencing what one person is saying and then you get into a conversation which is no longer explore any one person's point of view in any depth, so the larger you go in the conversation you are reaching more people but the richness of the conversation diminishes, now this is like a physics fact anyway and the social media suffering from this that if you make a lot of information available to people they can't concentrate on the everything at the same time, so they have to make choices and if they wish to stay connected with many things which is the beauty of being on social media, they will have to per force shallowly connected with many things they can't go to deep into too many things, otherwise they can't keep pretention to so many things so we have to make a choice between, richness and reach how are my intellectual and practical challenges this that in the vast conversations rather a large numbers of conversations happening can't we introduce more richness than there is presently, so I talk about the ways of mass dialogue, so I say even if in a ten minute conversation that I have with some person I could get to insights about myself and the other person that usually in a one hour conversation I don't get then I got efficiency introduced into a one on one conversation, similarly, if I could say a meeting of 10 persons, if conducted differently could enable those 10 persons to find something deeper about the system in which they are all together, as well as about themselves than that you do in a usual about the data conversation, so you see we talked about the data earlier many of our conversations are let's keep to the data and let's keep opinion out of this place. We say that, there's no time here to discuss your opinions, get the data out. So we force people to in fact not delve into the more important interesting things that we should be delving into for our own sakes and for the sake of the collective, we just stick it that data little and we are not learning more. Economics is having this problem because you know needs last masses of data so that so it can prove that this phenomenon applies everywhere so you use large amounts of data and the data doesn't represent accurately anything anywhere.

DJ: Getting deeper in a ten minute at one on one conversation and let's say deeper in a 10 person conversation that you are facilitating what are some of the tactical insights you want to share with

the listeners? For example what do you differently now and in 10 min one on one that you didn't maybe 20 years back?

AM: I find and my daughter does this in the California, she is master at this very well and my wife observes this about me now so we get into a train and just, you know some doorman at a place with us for ten minutes because the car hasn't come and she says you instinct is always to ask the person so nice to see you this is nice place, are you happy here? And then the person will say Yay or Nay, and then I will ask the person so what were you doing before this, of course if the person says happy here I promptly do ask, so what makes you so happy here? If the person who is very rarely they would say but they do say sometimes you know, it's not quite nice then I ask, so what's not quite nice here? And within three or four minutes that person had a conversation with me as they say to me that they hardly have with anyone else and I have learnt something about human being and the next time I meet that person I see that we can carry on from there if I want to or the person any case treats me differently that I seem interested in the person.

DJ: And maybe just to complete the point, leaders today go to a lot of meetings, facilitated a lot of meetings, what have you learnt about facilitating a productive meeting again when you were the part of the planning commission you have to facilitates meetings often with stakeholders on agendas that pulled in different directions, what have you learnt about the art of facilitation especially when you have got sort of diverse voices in room.

AM: Yes, well you know there are meetings and meetings and meetings, and the discussions and discussions and discussions. To design a good meeting one must establish first what's the purpose of the meeting that's how you start a design of anything, you know what the purpose of it is? So what's the purpose of this meeting so there can be a meeting which is merely to present some information to everybody and you call it a meeting, well that's the purpose then let's do that efficiently and effectively there can be a meeting where many people need to provide information so I can design a meeting where that is happening efficiently then there can be meetings where they say, where you say we want to start locating what is really going on here, going on here means the system. Then if they said that's the purpose of the meeting then I would ask them first that look is there enough information already available amongst you but what is going on this situation if not then you will have to have a longer meeting because in the first part at least this data level so that you have common data is out there after that we are going to another meeting as you will, it's the same group maybe in the second stage we are going to now explore, what we believe is right or wrong in what is going on out there and then deeper than that what we believe is causing this to happen, so this is you know our theories of why certain things are happening and quite often it of course ends up in logical differences as well as ideological differences.

DJ: And you also talk about discussion, debate, deliberation and dialogue and you talk about the specific differences between these, for the purpose of our understanding what's the crux of the insight here?

AM: Well I will say very broadly the 4 Ds, Discussion I say just like it doesn't matter, you are not bothering about whether there's a purpose here to it at all in a debate you are wanting to debate between two points of view and this is the old Socrates and the Greek necks said dialectical between this and that and this is been the form of discovery about the rightness in any matter that is gone on to the court systems, you know the prosecutor and the defendant and debates, and it's the, it's a way of enquiry, this way of enquiry of course makes you defend a point of view when one want to win against another. So you are setting up a sort of a boundary and a competition between two points of view, when you go into a deliberation, it's not a contest. There are different points of view when perhaps even conflicting points of view but you are not wishing to break it up into who

will won and who will lost and therefor in a deliberation I would not set it up against whether this versus that whereas I do find it is in TV or in college that it had to be are you for? Or you against? There are no grey zones. In a deliberation there are many greys happening there and so we are exploring them all but in the deliberation, we would stay in the ladder of meetings I was talking about at that second level where we got the data like and we are exploring what is going on, in a dialogue I wish to come to a deeper understanding about why you think that way and who you are? So the dialogue is always used as you know in that thing where two people generally where they say are in dialogue, four eyes conversation as the German said two eyes looking to two other eyes and trying to understand each other.

DJ: What have you learnt about the art of judgement which is making good decisions when you got multiple forces pulling in different directions, what have you seen good leaders do? And what have been your experiences in developing the sense of refined judgment, and how do you drive through the implementation?

AM: This comes under the deep matter of values and this is going on through human history between the utilitarian school and the individual human rights liberty school, the utilitarian school says if an action produces the maximum good for the maximum number of people even if some people are going to lose, it's a good decision, whereas the liberty school the human rights school says "even if one person suffers and may produce benefits for lots of others it is not the right decision" So this is the matter of very deep values, so I am saying here both seem right, I mean to me and you at this day in age the latter view about individual human rights seems as valuable view as would be the utilitarian view. Possibly 100 years ago the individual human rights view wasn't so weighty. I mean it was an individual's aspect as far Jesus came up or in our Buddha also the suffering the one person but it was the more universal thing was you know good leaders like Chanakya said "you just make sure the whole population must looked after" that's been a general thing about leaders of large system just make the whole system work and you have to sacrifice some fellows and fire them from the company for the sake of the continuity of employment of the rest and so be it. So I am saying that something very fundamental here, which can't be reconciled, however I go forth and say that situations are different also, so maybe in some situation and considering the nature of the decision to be taken I could take a utilitarian view. But there are other situations where I cannot and should not take the utilitarian view so what are these matters though and so people will say like the right to education and so long the majority of people educated if some few are not being well educated, who cares? I mean the average education, the country is fine. Country is going to progress and others would say well no even if a few children are left behind, it's a very bad system and you can't allow this to happen. Now this is a border-line sort of a thing, I reflect on it and I say I do believe that every child must have an equal right to the thing which will give them a chance thereafter in life to stand on their own feet then like every child has a need for an equal education and I don't care if the richer education suffers for the sake of providing an equal education to those deprived, even though if I multiplied and said, so many rich multiplied by the high quality is so big, so many poor by little less quality overall so I say No it is not a mathematical problem.

DJ: In the book you also talk about the parallel between Dan Kahneman and thinking slow and thinking fast and you sort of compare that to the listening talk to us a little bit about how that plays out and how we listen and what's the lesson for us to be thoughtful listeners.

AM: As Dan Kahneman says there's a thinking fast part of the mind and then there is a thinking slow part of the mind which processes for reflection and thinking slow the thinking fast part of the mind exist in all beings animals, birds and so it is the part which enables you take signal from the environment and make quick judgment about whether there's danger or like food opportunity and then you must move fast either you will be killed or you lose the opportunity so that's the thinking

fast part but human beings have more of than animals is the thinking slow part where you take data and the data gets stored and chewed upon like the cow chewing the cud and so you are trying to make sense of it and form a pattern out of it and get insights out of it. And you can't thinking slow like, it takes time you must loud reflect, what has being observed with the social media is because of the nature of the technology which is giving you things in very short bursts and offering you many choices, should I take that lead? That hyper link? And being tempted to buy now and click into amazon and so the thinking fast part of minds is being used most and any muscle that you use more any part of your body you use more grow stronger and here's the trade-off unfortunately because you time is being used than your mind and you are thinking fast and the overall capacity is one, the thinking slow part is not being used as much and its atrophying and tests on the shapes of brains young kids in the US have shown that they can already observe this shift. The earlier shift which is to do with the empathy part which is also the back part, the front part is danger no danger don't judge about who the person is and feeling empathy for the person that in college students in the united states in ten years' time this is after the social media has come they have observed the 40 to 50% decline in the empathy of college students to each other by standard psychological tests. Again they are attributing it to they are not spending time, deep time with each other just short shallow, connections with lots of people, you are getting the benefits of reach if you will and losing that richness and this is not the richness of your own mind and your own beings, so that's one side the other is this moral judgments that you are talking about, this is very large part of us which is built up through our histories and our conditioning and so which makes us value things which are like feeling loyal to family, feeling loyal to the community, feeling proud of my identity, respecting authority that enables us to survive as a family as a community, and so this is built in. for the sake of my survival and our goodness this doesn't sound rational to those who who believe in let's say philosophy through calculations cause these things are so instinctual, you sort of grow and conditioned by society also so when you do like a Greek philosopher or like a Shankaracharya, by reason you can discover what's the right thing to do, and the large part of us tells us the right thing to do without a reasoning, it's just built into our systems, in fact they are finding it in their genes also, some parts of the genes have some of these desires to support others like yourselves that's where the selfish gene so it's a much deeper thing than that. So I do think we need to start understanding ourselves fully.

DJ: What are some of the tactical things you changed in your life to ensure that you keep that thinking slow part humming, if you will?

AM: Reading. Reading is a wonderful thing especially if it's a tough book, it makes you stop and reflect, and think about you know why do I disagree about this? And is this person going to explain it or not and if not let me go and find someone else who's going to explain. So it makes me think very slow and makes me reflect.

DJ: How do you get your voice heard in a world that's getting noisier?

AM: You struck my present dilemma, and then I say why do I want to be heard? If I am feeling concerned that I am not being heard, I ask myself why do I want to be heard? What is so great about what I am saying or thinking that I insist that, desire that others hear it, why? So that's where I am at now.

DJ: And it's just maybe taking it forward if its worthy of get being listening to I guess the followership will follow, instead of you being louder.

AM: But there's a practical thing I don't know whether you experienced it and you perhaps do too in the work you do because you are a profound listener I can see but you want maybe this conversation to be heard by others then you will have to do something to get this conversation

noticed, you product noticed, what you do noticed and if you have to be noticed you will have to be more noticeable than other people so what they do the yelling that they do, the wrong facts that they put out to get attention to themselves you will have to do some of that otherwise you won't be noticed so are you willing to do that? And some people would say going back to the question you asked that if I have to make a difference to the world I have to do some of those things they are necessary things to do not that I like to do them. And this is where therefor comes to the political question to say well I need to get elected so that I can change the world and to get elected I would have to do many things which I am going to eliminate after I get elected there will be no corruption after that and so on I know I will be a dictator but after that there will be a democracy, it doesn't happen because you change meanwhile, you change. As Acton said power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, so once you are so strong that you could do it very easily you are no longer a person who wants to do it, once you become something else in the process so we need to be more effective, you I hope will be more effective getting others to hear the very lovely conversations, I have listened to the conversations that you had with other people is profound and I want to thank you for including me in your list of persons you talk to.

DJ: What about you has enabled you to come this far, what are some of the principles which have lead your life which you think had played a role in journey that you have had?

AM: We have been talking and you have been asking about the principles in my life but now you are relating it to like success and come this far and at this stage in life I am honestly feeling I think I have right I am honestly feeling that it's not important and whatever I have others may say I have achieved it's not important. So there for trying to relate what I do this thing as a success is not the thing that I have applied myself or wish to apply to myself too much because I don't want to lose something for the sake of having success so it goes back to this Bhagwat Geeta's thing which as I started reading the Bhagwat Geeta when my mother gave it to me when I was 15 or 16 years old and I come to chapter two and that paragraph which says you know you have the right to the work and not to the fruits there off and believe me, now I am 75 I just can't get beyond that chapter that was you have only right to the work and not the fruit there off and I think that speaks to the question you asked me I am doing what I believe is a good thing to do not because its producing a good result so when you talk of success is like a good result.

DJ: Using the lens of hindsight if you had to meet your 20 year self a 40 years self and 60 years self- what's that one piece of advice you would give?

AM: I think my 20 years self I find I can't give too much advise to the 20 years self was in a very innocent way more innocent view of the world thinking like I am thinking now. My 40 years self-had got a bit spoiled by success achieved rather soon. So, my 40 years self was struggling with these questions of staying on a track which was giving me success and what would happen if I stepped out of that track would I be noticed? Would I be successful? So if its success therefor causes that change in you which I have reflecting in hindsight not just today but before thought about it that that was the struggle going on in me in my early 40s when of course it was choice was thrust on me fortunately because of family circumstances that I just had to do something which have to start me all over again all over again discovering who I was, what I wish to do, what I could do even better and so it was a good reset.

DJ: And your 60-year self?

AM: Yeah, the 60 year self is same what the 40 year self-had confronted the choice and gone into the old track again and once again one has a journey up to success but I am a 60 again and why don't we recognised and celebrate it so I could again sense the same thing, I might giving it up needlessly

and why not others are keep saying, they keep saying to you at that age, you are young enough you are healthy enough and we need you still and the plays to your ego but I found it easier I must say, I found it easier when I was 60 than I did when I was 40 because I think you have reflected on these questions 20 years in between.

DJ: In summary what you want to tell the listeners about how to play to potential.

AM: I hope that every person sooner rather than later in life would feel that they would like to live their life even better in a way that will make life better for everyone so it's a sort of feeling of compassion for the world around and in that world better for everyone of course physical environment is a part of it too which is the whole system around oneself and of course people keep saying leave the world in a better shape than when you came into the world so maybe that's one way to put it another of course people say what sort of world are you leaving for your grandchildren and I ask young children today that look yes to ask me what sort of world I want to live to my grandchildren they are 13 year old and maybe they should be asking themselves the question about what sort of world do they want to live in? So I am asking myself and I ask, this is what I put out as a question to young people whatever age they are 40s or they are in their 20s, what sort of love do you want to live in? And in this collective conversations that you asked me about. I find when there are some 50 people or even 300 people in a room and the broad subject is how to make the world better or how they could be better leaders in their own life I always start with the question to them that what do you care about the most in life and I say just think about it and don't look at me and now you have to concentrate on your own thought and so if you feel like noting it down for your future reference please do so, so after five minutes I find that they are also *Mast* in their minds or writing some things down and I say I am going to give you two more minutes and then please them lets continue and after these two more minutes some have stopped some have to be stopped and say so and they say this is something we never reflect on, we are so busy doing as they said in the recent meeting I was like the Spanish team, you know passing balls very efficiently to each other (Tiki taka) we forget there's a goal and what's the goal of my life, what do I care about the most to achieve in life so after that I do suggest to them that if you could, let's take 10 more minutes out of this longer discussion that we are going to have and ask someone next to you, what they care most about in life, I mean they have thought about it now but listen to them don't start saying why do you think about it, this is first time I have heard it, it is unusual just calmly listen look in the eye appreciate to this persons caring and let the person hear you, now that also they want to hear a third person so I said OK we have got the ground prepared so in this with this character we go on later in to what one has to do, at the end of which I say about the first steps you are going to take towards creating a world which is going to have this quality of the caring and that you care about in the world, so what is it if you are going to do it now, whether you are 20 years old or you are 60 years old whatever, what is it you are going to do now to take you and the little world around you which you could influence on that path . So it's getting that definition of leadership into action, to take the first steps towards that which you deeply care about and in ways that others wish to follow and that's with the reminder to them to listen to the caring of others who could be in a partnership with them.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the podcast purposeful. I do think Listening to others' perspectives is one of the super-powers that we all need to have to make meaningful progress in the coming years.

More specifically, 3 things really resonated with me in this conversation.

1) First is the point Arun makes about asking better questions. When I am working with a leader in transition who comes to me saying, what I should do next with my life, I realize that it is imperative for me to understand their world the way they see it. How do they prioritize work, family, me-time and community? What does success mean to them? What energizes them and how their journeys have shaped their views on some of these questions? Only then do I feel ready to be of help to them in helping them navigate their ship effectively.

Even if I go back to my days as a Search Consultant at EgonZehnder, while discussing with candidates, I would often get a lot more insight about a person by trying to understand why they did what they did at various points in time rather than just focusing on what their stints have been and what they have accomplished in each of those stints.

2) The second thing that struck me in this conversation was the link Arun makes between Listening and Thinking Slow part of the brain. While I had read Dan Kahneman's book, I hadn't quite made the connection the way Arun did.

I guess, it is critical for each one of us to create the space or silence or the cabin in the woods we could escape to, for us to reflect on things, mull over ideas and let things marinate for a while. I am reminded of work by Adam Grant in his book Originals. One of my takeaways from the book was that for path-breaking creative thought to happen, if you plot the quality of the thought in the y axis and elapse time on the x axis, it often looks like an inverted U curve. He says, if you take too much time and procrastinate, the market might have moved on by the time you come up with your innovation. But he also says that there is something such as too early. If you haven't considered things enough, listened adequately to multiple perspectives and let the idea marinate in your head for a while. By doing it too quickly, you are missing out on benefiting from the "thinking slow" part of the brain where you are being deliberate and thoughtful about things.

I guess what reading does that other forms of media don't do enough of I guess it gives you the ability to pause, reflect, think, ponder, come back and deal with the content at your pace rather than it being thrown at you. I guess the key is also, are we listening to ourselves enough as we go through our journeys.

3) The third thing that struck me was that we all have a role to play in how we frame a conversation or an interaction. Whether we set it up as a discussion, deliberation, dialogue or a debate. The structure of the conversation needs to be informed by the objectives.

Every so often, meetings are organized without adequate thought to who should attend, how it would be facilitated, what a good outcome would be and so on.

The other thing that occurred to me was that we possibly need more deliberations where we are trying to explore each other's point of view and build a more nuanced understanding of the situation and fewer debates where each side is trying to win the argument at all costs.

As a leader, how we frame the conversation and facilitation the interaction can play a significant difference in the outcomes and the culture of the organization.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversations at the Play to Potential Podcast. The next guest is Ambi Parameswaran, one of the leaders in the Ad Agency world. He talks about his book – SPONGE – where he discusses the learnings he has had working with various CEOs ranging across Ratan Tata to Varghese Kurien to Karsanbhai Patel. If you are a

marketer or a professional providing Advisory Services to CEOs and Board Members, you might find some of those insights relevant.

Thank you for spending your valuable time on the podcast. To know more about the work I do, you could visit transitioninsight.com. Bye now.

End of transcription

Nugget from Ravi Venkatesan that is referenced: [Listening intently during Transitions](#).

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Curiosity: "A Curious Mind" by Brian Grazer (Oscar winning Producer of movies like A Beautiful Mind and Apollo 13) was the inspiration behind the Play to Potential Podcast. In this playlist, Leaders reflect about the role of curiosity and how it has helped them in their journeys. As Alvin Toffler says, the Illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Building trust: Becoming a Trusted Advisor is often the Holy Grail for a lot of Business Advisors. This issue is as relevant for businesses as they think about how their consumers interact with their brand. Leaders talk about what it takes to build trust with an individual. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Inflection points: Inflection points are when the notion of “what got you here won’t get you there” hold. Whether it is a company moving from a start-up to a scale-up or a leader moving from a CXO to a CEO role, these passages of play have to be navigated carefully as there is a high risk of derailment. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Settling into a new context: Figuring out “where to go” is only a part of the challenge for leaders in transition. How you land effectively in a new context is as critical. Hair line cracks often become full blown fractures if not attended to carefully. Leaders talk about some key lessons Individuals could bear in mind as they transition across contexts (Army to Business world, US to India, MNC to Family Business, and Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

Leadership Development: “How do I grow” is a question that all of us grapple with. The recipe for success is also changing as we move from an Industrial paradigm to a Digital paradigm. This is all the more pronounced in a start-up context where the job outgrows you very quickly. Successful leaders talk about the role of mentors, coaching, listening and more in scaling up one’s capability. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Culture: Culture eats Strategy for breakfast but how does one build it. Leaders across domains (Academics, Armed Forces, Silicon Valley, Bollywood, Venture Investing) talk about the notion of culture and how they go about building it in their organizations. 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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Arun Miara - Nuggets

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- 34.01 Arun Miara - Art of asking good questions
- 34.02 Arun Miara - Steering by listening
- 34.03 Arun Miara - Giving feedback by listening
- 34.04 Arun Miara - Having deep conversations at scale
- 34.05 Arun Miara - The art of facilitation
- 34.06 Arun Miara - Judgment and values
- 34.07 Arun Miara - Listening & "Thinking fast and slow"
- 34.08 Arun Miara - Being heard in a noisier world
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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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