



Guest

Indranil Chakraborty runs StoryWorks that helps organisations and leaders harness the power of stories to create and deliver impactful messages. He has spent two decades of experience leading teams and driving change at reputed firms such as Unilever, Tata Group and Mahindra & Mahindra.

He is the author of the book "Stories at Work - Unlock the secret to Business Storytelling" published recently by Penguin Random House. In our conversation, we talk at length about some of the insights in the book. Indranil first demystifies the term "Business Storytelling" and distinguishes it from other forms of storytelling. We then discuss other elements including how one should listen to stories and collect them systematically, the different applications of storytelling, how story telling bridges the asymmetry that often exists due to the "curse of knowledge", how one can build deeper relationships through stories, how we can bake in the story-telling habit in our life and more.

The lessons from this conversation could be relevant to a range of people. But specifically, this conversation is likely to be specifically relevant to four constituents. 1) Entrepreneurs that are trying to build a certain culture in their company; 2) CEOs that are trying to mobilise the organisation around a certain set of values and a certain vision; 3) HR leaders who are looking to drive change in the organisation; 4) parents who are looking to connect more with their children.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 37th conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast, a series of reflective 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. To know more about the advisory work I do, you could visit www.transitioninsight.com

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 Indranil Chakraborty, a professional who specialises in Business Story-telling. He has recently written a book titled 'Stories at Work – Unlock the Secret to Business Storytelling'. The book is published by Penguin Random House and is available in all the usual online and offline book stores.

Story telling is such a critical skill for us to develop and it can have a transformational impact at work and at home. More specifically, this conversation is likely to be relevant for Entrepreneurs who are trying to build a certain culture, CEOs who are trying to transmit their strategy into their company, Parents who are trying to get their point across to their children, just to underscore three constituents who might seek value from this conversation.

Without further ado, over to the conversation with Indranil.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What you do? And why you do what you do? Give us a sense of it please.

Indranil Chakraborty (IC): I help leaders and organizations harness the power of stories to ensure that the communication is more impactful, more memorable. Basically helping them connect better, engage better, inspire more by using the power of stories so that's the very top level thing of what I do.

DJ: I want to take you back to the point in time let's say early 2013 you were the chief marketing officer of Mahindra Holidays and you decided to take the plunge and start story works, so talk to us little about that transition, how did you take the decision and what gave you the conviction? This was the plunge that made sense for you.

IC: That's been an interesting journey, so the year was 2011 when Mahindra holidays decided to do something very different in the sense that they uprooted their head office which was in Chennai and brought it to Mumbai to Mahindra Towers, they had a transition of CEOs, the new CEO transited a lot of people in the leadership team so we were all very new and the good thing to do at when you are new is to decide that everything everyone had done before you is not up to the mark so you change everything and I was head of strategy & marketing, so I was there to change the strategy of the company the vision the mission the brand the logo and all that and one of the things we had to do is to rewrite let's say the vision and mission, now I have always found the vision and the mission to be a funny thing because for most companies to me it reads like a score card not something that I would want to come to office Monday morning and we want to be the third largest insurance firm by 2020 that's just score card. So, instead of vision and mission I came up with something called Credo and our credo was "making every moment magical" it seemed to tick all the boxes, it was inspirational, we thought it was! It was measurable, it worked for the CEO, it worked for the janitor, and the next question was how you ensure that everyone, all employees across Mahindra Holidays is delivering magical moments. So we did need some guidelines for behaviour and the HR guy rightly said that's Values. And like most of the companies we had something on the wall which said things like integrity and sustainability and stuff like that and my thing was that even if the employees maxed out on each of those we won't be able to deliver magical moments because to me for most companies these values are really table stakes today. There might have been a time where there could be a more ethical company and less ethical company today you can't be not in ethical company that's not a choice so to me I call them hygiene values not winning values and I needed winning values, values that will help employees deliver magical moments. Of course the problem

was, no one had the guts to go to Anand Mahindra and say integrity is no longer a value so we created a new piece of document which we called the code of conduct and moved all this integrity, sustainability moved all that into that piece of paper Table stakes and in the blank piece of paper we wrote down things like no room for ordinary, why? Because ordinary can't be magical, we said experience is everything, why? Because half the company which was the guys in sales were tapping people like you and me and saying five-star holiday. Now, what is five-star holiday? I mean we are not technically five star and even if you were what do that mean to a consumer? And I said you know we need to sell experiences and then I went to the other side of the company which is the resorts, we had the people from the Taj, the Oberois running these resorts and I went and told them, we need a differential experience and they said sure, give us some more inches, more inches of TV more inches of mattress and I was trying to tell them that you know hard bed in a tree house might be the most magical experience and so experience is everything became the second and so on and so forth so now all that worked in the head office, everyone got it, everyone is actually very proud of it, we even won a few award within the group for the kind of values we had but what went into my head was this funny place which said oh my god maybe I have made another poster, how do you ensure that values are understood by everyone across the company and it's not about translation, how does the housekeeping boy in Himachal understand no room for ordinary and I had no answer, I read, I wrote to people, I asked questions and finally what I found out was that you run workshops, so I run workshops, made lots of posters, T-shirts, Coffee cups and nothing seems to have worked and in that search, I don't know what I searched but I searched something on Google once and I landed upon the blog of a guy called Shawn Callahan, Shawn had this little company in Australia called Anecdote and he talked about how stories worked and he talked about how stories can help abstract things can become concrete and it seemed to make sense and I was lucky because Shawn and his business partner Mark visiting India in the next three months, I went and spent two days with them when they were in Delhi and they taught me narrative work and what they said was that, we never looking at things that were abstract, instead of writing more abstract lines to explain that abstract word use stories to make them concrete. So, he said go collect stories from the organization of what people in the organization think is that value being lived and he said when you collect the stories 80% of the stories will be junk because people don't understand that value but you will find 20% of the stories which are absolutely what you meant and they also taught me how to collect stories because if you go and tell a person tell me story of no room for ordinary I don't know how to react. So having learnt that as I came back every time I visited a sales branch the resort I got people together and I did what I called story listening which is collecting stories and I came back of course like Shawn had predicted with 80% junk let me give you a junk example so this house keeping boy in Rajasthan has telling me, "sir one day an extra-large family came to the resort" so, said what is an extra-large family, he said sir four children and mother father and parents wanted two extra towels and then the children started demanding two extra towels, I didn't say anything and I provided 18 towels in one room and that's no room for ordinary, now he wasn't pulling my leg, he genuinely believed that instead of four towels, you gave 18 towels with a smile is his understanding, but that's not what I had in mind because that is not a magical moment when you get two extra towels but in all this junk you get stories like the one I have written in the book about, which was told to me by a receptionist at the cool resort and he talks about his colleague who gets a call from a member and takes the message and then he calls the lunch room and when the colleague is talking to the lunch room the other guy the story teller over hears this and his colleague tell the lunch room that member is coming with two children and his wife and they are stuck in traffic they can't make it for the lunch service can we pack some lunch boxes and keep? When this guy over hears he asks, hey did you ask the member? Which route he is coming from? He said this route, they

he said call the dining hall again, he said why? Tell them to pack some tea and cakes, he said why, he said don't you know there is a flower show that will be inaugurated by the local politician, the police have blocked that road there is no way these members are going to come by 6 o'clock so he says, OMG there's children in the car, half an hour later the shift gets over, this guy without telling anyone, without taking any permission goes to the lunch room, picks up those lunch boxes ties it up on his bike travels through some interior roads for some 8-9 kilo meters keeps calling the members mobile locates the car and goes and gives these boxes and says your children must be hungry and that is living the value 'No room for ordinary!' and suddenly people get it because what you did with that is you converted something abstract no room for ordinary into something concrete, because stories are concrete and then of course you need to tell those stories, so we rechecked our entire process of let's say induction program, every company that I know of or that I worked with has an induction program which has one section called values and in those values you take abstract words and then explain it with more abstract, so you take an English word and use more English word to explain that English word, I won't name companies but companies with the word in the value statement called stewardship, what does stewardship mean? Or something as simple as respect and everyone thinks yes I know what respect is. I have worked with the companies when I have asked questions so tell me about respect give me an example of respect in your company, oh sir we respect people very much, I said ok I understand give me an example, he said last year when I over shot my target in November itself my CEO called me and personally congratulated me, he treated me with a respect, no he didn't, he gave you recognition that's not respect, so that's what the problem with abstraction is. So we redesigned our induction programs etc. and any speech that any senior leader gave, if he ever opened his mouth to say we believe in you he had to support it with a story and the transition that I saw was magical, one year of my trying everything was not working and now suddenly people were getting it, I won't say hundreds but over the next two three months I got at least 7-8 stories from the system which showed me people are getting it and that's when I was also, I mean when you look back a lots of dots connect, I was looking at many things happening in my head and this gave me an opportunity to step out and do something on my own, so that's really how I got into story telling.

DJ: So, Indranil – lets jump into the book. Congrats on the book and the initial success in the first few weeks. You use the term Business Story telling. For the purpose of listeners on this podcast, what is the nuance here? How business story telling is different from storytelling?

IC: So let me take the two sides of the spectrum, if you were to draw an axis on one end of that spectrum is what I called Big S storytelling, Big S story telling is the usual story telling that we are aware of whether you take the Ramayana or the Mahabharata or the DDLJ or Harry Potter, I don't operate anywhere there for me business story telling is at the other extreme. This is little stories, little recount of experiences you have had all of which can be very powerfully brought in to make a point during business, business conversations etc. so to me that is Business storytelling; business story telling is harnessing it in the context of business. The critical differences to me are A – the amount of detail that you need to get into any story when you are in business needs to be only what is required to drive home that point and nothing more so there is a whole lot of work that you need to do to make sure that you don't keep back in the story stuff that you like which need not be important for delivering that message very clearly whereas if you are doing it in the bar, you can be rambling a bit adding things that are not there. The second big difference to me is storytelling in Business needs to be for a reason a business reason. There must be a reason why you telling a story, you are trying to make a point you are trying to illustrate something, you are trying to deliver something in a way that is more memorable, in a bar you could walk in and say let me tell you a

story why? Because I heard a great story. Now you can't do that in business. And the last thing is because it is business and this is where I differ from the new generation of business story tellers that have arrived in the last five years is, I believe that the business story telling is doesn't have to do with anything like voice modulation. Very often the L&D person in the companies I work with, they look at my agenda at workshop and say, where is voice modulation? And my answer is in the theatre. For some reason in this country a lot of public speaking training and now story telling training is done by people from theatre, now while they are good at theatre we are not going to be doing theatre in the board room, we need to be in board room talking like you usually do in board rooms because otherwise it is going to stand out and one of the things that we have to understand is that no matter how convinced you are about the power of stories in business there is a huge wall between business and storytelling and the reason it is there is the label we have for stories, stories are made up, stories are for entertainment, stories are largely for children exactly in the opposite of what we have in business, Business is fact business is about only sticking to the point how many of us have not had this situation where we have been trying to explain why something hasn't happened on the boss says *Kahani mat Batao* what does that mean Kahani is the bad word which is why when you bring stories into business your story has to invisible what I mean by that is when someone is listening to your story he can't be saying he is telling the story because as soon as their brain figures out you are telling a story and then it figures out oh it's a board room he saying oh what an idiot? So that's to me some of the key differences between story-telling and business story telling.

DJ: Where do you see the line between brevity and storytelling? Brevity is something that is celebrated do you see a trade of there or it is a false trade off?

IC: Not at all in fact one of the key things I teach and, in the book, also talk about it is brevity in storytelling. So, what happens is when you have a story to tell and why are we doing storytelling in business? We are trying to harness three big powers of story. One is stories are easy to understand, stories are easy to remember and stories are easy to retell. Some of the things that you do not get in a business situation how many off sites have you been to? Where the CEO or some senior leader has explained the next year strategy and then when people have comeback and their teams have said boss what was discussed in Goa he said strategy of next year what is the strategy? Or one power point will come, why is not repeatable? Because all those hours of so called business clear with lots of brevity has not landed. Now, when you use stories or story structures you get that power and you can do it in that same amount of time you would have otherwise taken because in many cases because of the layers of different English lines and sentences you are trying to explain very simple can be done with a story actually sometimes even shorter, so I don't see any fight between brevity, the desire for brevity and storytelling, in fact in the work of storytelling one of the critical things is brevity because brevity is best delivered when there is simplicity in communication and I love a Leonardo Vinci quote which said "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" and so when you are able to get very simple with your message you are not going to be long with it but that simple tight story will deliver much more than what a long paragraph of a lot of huge English word will have manage to do.

DJ: In the book you also talk about four different applications of storytelling building rapport, explaining change, handling mental blocks and sharing best practices. Talk to us a little bit about, how the storytelling approach is nuanced in each of this context, how is it different in each of this context?

IC: So, this is not necessarily the, what is the nice word there? Mutually exclusive collectively exhaustive sort of area where you can use storytelling. To me these are the building blocks I start with to get people comfortable into their journey of storytelling so I keep talking about this both in the book and in any of my key note or training programs, is that I don't do the art of storytelling. Is there an art to storytelling? Of course there is you don't need it in business, not till you are doing something that I do which is three hour keynote, that's a long keynote you need a bit of art there but for almost all business conversations none of them are three hour keynotes you don't need art, you can do it with science and what is science? Science to me is process, repeatable, measurable and predictable. So if you did ABC and got D today, someone else should be able to do ABC and get D tomorrow so in order to get that kind of stuff what I have done is I have looked at three four areas and you took a four of them, I have five in my head, which are important for us in business where currently we have a challenge and I have put in together process for each one of them and said in this situation if you do ABC you will get a powerful story to use. Now, is it going to be that regimented in your life? No, not at all. To me the way I look at it is that this is what I called as my balance wheels of business storytelling, when you and I learnt how to cycle, you got up and a cycle felt graced our knees got up! Our children learn with these two training wheels of storytelling, fantastic stuff, you don't fall off, you don't bruised similarly in the business context the way I see it is you don't make mistakes and hence bruised your ego and then throw out storytelling. This will help you get your storytelling going. Most of my training programs we work for six months and people who read the book I talk about locked about practice in the book and I say after you get good at this throw your those training wheels, then you can do your wheelies, your stunts, your skits, so these are just getting the sort of rules right and what we have done there is looked at four areas which are powerful and important and we have a challenge, so the first one is building a relationship, building a rapport we know that what builds rapport is who we are, our character yet whenever we get the chance to introduce ourselves you only use credentials and one of the reasons that might happen is because it's easy to come and say hi! I am a computer science engineer from so and so place and you will believe me but I can't come and say hi I am very trust worthy, doesn't work and so we have a challenge which is one we know that for people to build relationship with us, or people to buy us before they buy our product, Idea or Service they need to know who we are? Yet we use credentials the story bridges the gap then what is this, this I call a connection story, its tiny anecdotes from your life which when blended into your initial conversations sometime into your introduction can leave the listener with the inference of who you are and what you stand for, so that's one area we then talk about, so this is one the out of the four which is actually a story the rest of them are not stories as much as they are just story structures.

DJ: And what's the distinction there?

IC: A story is a story, we can break that after if you want but I guess most people understand what the story is. Now a story has a structure which means it has a, if you take a basic structure of the story which is called the story mountain or the Freytag's triangle, you start with exposition which is setting up the context, setting up the background then you set up the challenge or its call the rising action or the rising tension, then you reach to the place where you don't know whether it's going to work or not going to work called the climax then you have the solution that has come and then you have the falling tension or the falling action and finally conclusion that's the very basic story structure what we have done in the next few areas which is when we are trying to change messaging we are only trying to change people's mind or sharing success. We have used these various story structures to craft our messages. I do a lot of consulting work as well using stories so one of the big areas of work that I do is helping organizations when they are coming up with the change messages

like new strategy, new vision, transformation and what I do with the team is help them craft their transformation or strategy like a story so I am not writing a story about the strategy, I am writing the strategy like a story and the structure I use is what in the book we have covered called the clarity story and the same thing another structure to change people's mind another structure to share success.

DJ: The other thing that caught my attention on the book Indranil that the point you make about tappers and listener as somebody who is passionate about music, I found the example quite interesting you talk about an experiment where there is asymmetry of knowledge or information and you relate that to why power point sometime is not as effective talk to us about the nuance here?

IC: Ok so I am going to tap a tune on the table you are a musician so I think you will get it and I am going to ask you to tell me what the song that I just tapped is. Let's start. You give me some genre or? It's a very popular English song and you learnt it in your earlier days in school. Come on you didn't get it its Jingle bell, Jingle bell. Now what just happened the reason I got it is because the tune was in my head and when the tune is in my head that sound is like jingle bell for me when the tune is not in your head that sound is like noise and that's really the experiment that Elizabeth Newton who was doing her studies Stanford. Infect she went on to become a professor in Howard later so she did this experiment where she took 240 students and divided into 2 groups one group she called tappers and their job was to do what I just did tap on the table the group was called decoders of listener and their job was to guess the tapping and then she told the entire group that listen this group of tappers I am going them a list of very popular English songs, songs that everybody knows Jingle bell, happy birthday, Merry Christmas and they will randomly pick up a son and you guys will decode the song. Here is a piece of paper and pen you will not tell them what you have guessed and I am going to make to make you guys in to pairs and send you out. When they came back, she asked the tappers individually how it went. And the usual answer I think it went up well. Why do you think it went up well? Suck an easy song everyone knows the song and I think I did a decent job of that tapping. When asked what percentage of you are 100 % sure that your partner got it. The usual answer was about 60 to 70%. Then she would go over to the listeners and take their paper work which was the guess that they had and tabulated the result and, on an average, less than 2 % or 2.5 % never got it and that also I think is just random. Ya you just got it right. This is exactly what she says which is basically what she is saying when she is saying curse of knowledge is when then tune is in my head, we just demonstrated in Jingle bell. I know its working but when your tune is not in your head that's noise. So, to me the analogy that that was the morning I read this it was my epiphany you know my eureka moment I said oh my god for the last 8 to 10 years in my corporate life and you are senior enough to come up with strategy, vision, mission and stuff like that. I did not come up with that in the morning of the off-site. I had worked with for weeks if not months, with my teams sometimes with a Bain or McKinsey. And by the time I came to the stage that tune was running in my head and I walked up on stage and did the corporate version of tapping which id bullet point on a PowerPoint and I came back came off stage thinking you know easy song descent tapper they must have got it and then 7 days later I am tearing my hair saying you know why don't they get it and now of course the favourite whipping boy is millennials. There is nothing wrong with millennial or any one. It's wrong with the way we have structured our communication. Half of it is in our head and we think everyone has that in theirs as well.

DJ: So, I think the take away from this is again linking it back to storytelling again if you could sort of talk a little bit about what's the so what?

IC: Respond: so, what is one of the big issues that we have in when we are doing this is the context where we are coming from is assumed where the context the listeners has is not the same as the one that the teller has. Now when you just craft your messages you tend to jump to the message without the context without the why. I am thinking that you know that this is your company people these are your team people so you don't really need to explain. When you then are forced to take this message and put it into a story structure that automatically forces you to set context you can't tell a story without a context. So, when you bring the message into a structure of a story you will start with expositions setting up the base before jumping into the action and so that's the analogy.

DJ: I want to jump to another term that you use in the book Indranil story listening again first time I came across the term I have heard listening but story listening was interesting so again talk to us about what the nuance here I think you talk about how we should frame our question so that we elicit a rich story? So, give us a sense of story listening and how it is different from listening?

IC: So, the person to credit with the word story listening Shawn Callahan is the term he coined its basically says how do you collect stories and the reason we need to be looking at this differently from just the obvious which is if we just go and say tell me a story because tell me a story in business context doesn't work. So, if I come to you saying tell me story of great application of knowledge and you will look at me and say what did you smoke last night whereas you do have various examples from your work life of great application of knowledge, I am sure you have. Now I need to frame questions in a way that will help you really go back to a moment in time because that's where the memories are right - a moment in time. So, the kind of questions that you need to face to take you there so one of the things that will take you there if I tell you another story which is about application of knowledge so I say you know Deepak in this company they had this this what a brilliant application of knowledge. Sometimes stories trigger stories because you remember another moment in time where something like that happened. So, one way to elicit stories is to tell another story another way to elicit stories is to actually turn the story pyramid ups and down. What is the story pyramid and you have been in McKinsey so I am sure you read the whole book a is the most important question is "WHY"? Pyramid Principle? No this is not the pyramid principle this is basically saying that question pyramid so the most important question is "WHY" then "HOW" then "WHAT" the country cousin because somewhere is not important "WHEN" and "WHERE". The problem with this when it comes to elicit stories is the "WHY", "HOW" and "WHAT" are opinion generating questions. Why does project go wrong in this company you are not gone get a story? It will say because of you know they are underfunded or don't have management oversight. How do you choose a great trainer oh you choose a great trainer by doing A B C. No stories? But I would have turned this pyramid and put "WHEN" and "WHERE" question is the most important. When was the last time you actually got the right trainer and how did it happen? That will take you to a moment in time and get me a story. Where did you last see the great application of knowledge it will take you to a moment in time and get you a story? This process of asking question that take you to a moment in time and get a story is what we called a story listening.

DJ: How do you and again wearing a consultant's hat here sometimes when you ask the "WHY" question or the "WHAT" question you are expecting people to process multiple stories and come up with the net insight and sometime asking them to throw up a data point might you know the deprive you of that aggregated insight. Is there a loss there?

IC: I don't think so this is an either or situation there are time where I might want to and I am sure that there many times that I want to ask the why question. Where I want to aggregate your

understanding there are times when I want an individual example. One of the things that I think is grossly misused in this listen. I have been told this for many times as a marketer and I wish I had the answers I have now. I would go for a market visit I would come back very excited about an observation and I would table it saying you know what I saw was this this and then some senior guy would say there is no room anecdotal evidence. We need data. I wish I had the definition that I have now my new definition is data is nothing but plural of anecdote. So, there is nothing wrong looking at that individual stuff because the richness is in the individual stuff. When you give me a why I don't always have the reason why you have come to that why. If I have to understand how you have come to that why I have to go behind and look at some of this individual stuff. So again, I don't think it's either wrong. It's when you want that richness, the texture of where that final opinion comes from that a story listening might be more important.

DJ: Now again may be this is a question from line of work that I am into let's say story listening and coaching again you don't discuss that explicitly in the book but I guess each individual life is so unique and so nuanced and so much of who we are and why we do what we do is contextual. As a coach I am curious about how we can leverage the power of stories to understand another human being?

IC: By the way I do am an ICF certified coach. I don't talk about it too much that's only because I personally think that you know when people meet people, they need to put them in boxes to handle and if I say I am this and that and they don't know which box to put me in. I'd rather at this point occupy the story telling box. Now I think one is and you know this because you are practicing this so much is the power of listening is the difference between so many things. When I had become a coach one of the first thing my wife said is why you didn't become the couch earlier about the power of listening. Now the thing is that if I take the would I do with my new knowledge of story listening in coaching is really ask people to make real their opinions. So, if they came and said you know I don't want to do this because my boss is judging me is that's an opinion. If I go back and say give me an example of your boss judging you then I know what exactly what he means because remember again A) language is complex B) most of us are not even native English speakers. The word judging me may mean two different things to the coacher and the coachee and so if you jump into conclusion saying oh that's what he means why my boss is judging. You are now listening for that kind of judgement which is different from what he thinks is judging. If you can make that real so you are not listening to the fact that he is saying that the boss is judging but you are listening to the reality behind that statement of boss is judging and then you are on the same concreteness.

DJ: I think the again talking more on the home front, your book also got me reflecting on the impact stories can have in one's family life as a parent of as a father of two young kids I was just wondering just such a powerful way of getting messages across rather than telling them things again this is possibly not related to business story telling but may be a quick detour any quick insights on what leaders can learn in applying stories to their home context?

IC: Yes, absolutely I means it's not just home it's about communication so I would have brought this to the crux it's something that I have just mentioned little earlier which is what stories are doing is making things real. So, when you go and tell people you need to work hard to succeed that's abstract both hard work, success and the relationship between the two. Now why do you have that opinion all the opinion that you give your kids in business or in society where this opinion did comes from. You are not born with these opinions. Your opinion came from either a story that you are part of or the story that you have heard and that's how opinion happened. When instead of just giving

the opinion alone you tell the story that made you to have that opinion that guy gets it. That guy also remembers it and the reason for that is very simple which is that when we give opinion, we are actually taking to the neocortex part of the brain which process language, data etc. but that's the young brain and it's extremely bad with memory its good when are interacting and then it forgets. Now however when you tell me a story I visualize when I told you that story earlier about the Coorg receptionist did you or did you not visualized to receptionist your receptionist could be one woman one men mine could be both men doesn't matter. You may not have been to... but you imagined the reception. This went to that part of your brain that does not understand language but processes visuals and emotions and this part of the brain has been with man for hundreds and thousands of years and scientists believe that because of the fact that it has been with us for hundreds and thousands of years it's been fantastic with memory. So, when you can not only appeal to the neocortex which is dealing with language but using a story appeal to the part that can remember because that part does not understand language it understands visuals and emotions. Then suddenly not only do you have the clarity of the message you have memorability as well. So, what I urge you to do is the next time you are driving an opinion at home which of course you will do thousands of times in a day. Wait for the one as a starting point wait for the one that you really believe in strongly and before you pontificate on it just ask yourself why I believe this. Whatever it is. Why do I believe that? What has happened in my life? Or what I have heard about someone else life that makes me believe this and then share that incident along with that opinion and see magic happen.

DJ: I'd love to move to making this real I read in the book what I really liked was you talked about how we can make it a practice right so I would love to talk a little bit about that and the first picks is about the process gold dust to use your words you talk about a very specific approach and even get into this specifics of using ever note as an app again an app that I use quite a bit. Talk to us about what's the discipline here in gathering gold dust?

IC: Now there are other two things that you have touched upon 1) Practice and I'll come to that separately the second thing he talked about was ever note. I'll not get into too much detail in that just now but if we have to become a story teller then we can't be a one-story wonder. You can't think that oh my god I see he is here and he is gone tell us the COORG story again. I need to have different stories and to have different stories I need to be able to remember different stories and there is only that many stories I can remember so we need to find a device. I used to earlier write it down now I use ever note to put in all the stories and the reason for ever note and not the apple note is to do with the way our brain store stories. Our brain store stories index on the characters and the plot but not the message. So, for example if I would to ask you that tomorrow you have a presentation to make and In the presentation you are going to make a point that skills and competences are not a guarantee for success and I say Deepak why don't you use a story everyone will relate too. That will drive home the same point. Chances for most people no story will pop up but isn't the hare and tortoise story a story about skills and competences are not being a guarantee for success. Why won't one of the oldest stories that you have learnt pop up that's because the brain has stored it under Hare and Tortoise or under the faster animal went to sleep. But in business you don't need the hare and tortoise story. In business you need the skills and competences story. So not only we need a data base but we need to index the data base into very differently then we normally remember. So even if I want to data base the hare and tortoise story which of course in my book I say don't go there first stick to factual story rather than made up. You need to save it indexed as skills and competences and so Evernote allows tagging of notes so when you take that story and tag it as skills and competences when you later look for it you will get that story because like I said in business you will need the hare and tortoise story. You will need the skills and competences story.

So that why Evernote as practice. So, the book has a full chapter of how to store your stories and also our YouTube channel has a video on how to use Evernote for it. Coming to practice and you are a musician so you will get this are the basic issues with practice and let's talk about me not playing the guitar despite the fact that I want to play the guitar. I have a guitar that being sort of travelling with me in the last 4 to 5 houses I have shifted and that's because of a few things one is I have e never put in a stake in the ground. So, a simple little stake in the ground would not be that I want to rock a concert in Bandra-Kurla. If the stake in the ground is in my wife's next birthday, I will play happy birthday in the guitar that's a stake on the ground the second is to understand that I have to make baby steps and not sort of give it away as soon as I doesn't sound right so I pick up the guitar and the first few strings tell me clearly I'll never be Mark Knopfler. And I give it up. But that was not the objective. Again, said yes, the stake in the ground I should be able to strum happy birthday in way that she would recognize it. That's fantastic so I have put a stake in the ground and setup targets for myself which is achievable and then of course it comes to what I called deliberate practice. I think one of the big things that I do not agree with is practice makes perfect. To me the analogy is imagining that from today that I tell you that I am going to play badminton in my society every evening. What are the chances that I might actually represent the state zero but every evening, two hours for the next 3 years? That's hell out of practice. But that's just repeating what I am doing and there will be will be will I'll be better than today I will get but then I will have a diminishing return curve. Deliberate practice says pick up little different parts of whole and just master that first. Once you mastered that then you master the next. So, getting back to the badminton analogy I will say this month all I learn to do well is drop shots and that's all I do. Drop shots followed by drop shots followed by drop shots. I go to YouTube I look up the best way to do drop shots or get myself a couch. I'll do drop shots maybe I'll video myself and send it to someone saying am I getting it right. Till I'll get dam good at drop shots. Next week or next month I'll get into smashes and then next week or next month I'll get into serves. That way I would then pick up and be much better in the game. I still may not represent the state but I'll be an awesome player.

DJ: And just bring it back to the world of storytelling again if one is trying to build a habit of business story telling would you break it into two or three things that people could be deliberate about what would you break it into?

IC: So, I would go back to like you said that I have got this various different kind of stories or story structure. I would say pick up one of them. Just practice that one now and see how it goes do it little more and do it little more and given that business has this huge issue of people saying no I can't do it because this is very important, I can't do it in a client meeting. So, tell people in my workshops says look for low evaluative low judgement situations and there are. I am talking to my team that can't be high evaluation high judgment. Try story telling there. And I know it will work. Stories work. I mean there two ways about it and when it works you will get more confidence to try it in a slightly more risky place and instead of trying all of them at one go pick up each little types of stories that I have taught in the book. And try each one, one by one. Then see how that goes. But again, put a stake on the ground tell yourself ok the town hall that I am addressing six months from now is when I am going to use two stories and I am going to see how it works. So that is stake in the ground and I am going to try out my first kind of stories in my little team meeting next month. Before which I will use the process, I tell in the book to bring brevity to that story. By doing all this we just putting little goals, achievable goals. Putting a stake on the ground doing that practice in a little deliberate way you can definitely become a story teller.

DJ: What's your advice for companies to bring a culture of storytelling into their organization? Where do they start with and then go along in their journey.

IC: To start with there has to be someone and ideally someone reasonably senior who starts with the belief that stories work. And then the first thing I tell people who come and tell me I believe stories work but how do I explain that to my boss? Go back to Mahatma Gandhi which said be the change you want everyone else to be, start telling stories. When you are going to demonstrate how by telling stories you are making a difference in your communication people will start learning now that obviously can't translate to the wider audience, so you do need to get a structured training program who ever does it. The once think that I would like people look at where they are trying to choose how and who do they train with is first is get people from business to teach your business story telling because storytelling is a little alien to most people or at least there are these labels of stories are for entertainment, stories are for children when you get a non-business person coming in my brain is already saying it doesn't work in business, it's further enforced, that guy is from theatre and when they bring in things like voice modulation it makes me more uncomfortable but if you get a business person coming and telling you, someone who is been in senior position has been in board meeting like you have been in important presentations saying you can use it brings source credibility. Second, don't look for one off training programs I mean not just for storytelling, I don't think one hour training works any which way, the number of trainings that I have been sent to where at the end of the day I was very convinced this is fantastic and then I came back and did exactly same what I was doing earlier so make sure that there is a deliberate practice program that you set up now whether that is set up with the person that you trained or through your internal sort of processes, whichever but make sure that there is practice program that is put and that is calendared and not left to other people whether they want to do it or not third when you are evaluating people who are going to come and deliver training on story telling evaluate whether they tell stories, I mean I had an interesting conversation just the other day with a head of HR who said you know I get it the work you do I get it but you know you are very expensive, we have a few other people who come and pitched, I said you know you have got to go with who you want to go. Just curious these other guys who pitched how many stories did they tell you during their pitch? He thought for a while and said none. And I said that's a bit counterintuitive, someone's come to sort of sell you storytelling and hasn't told you single story so these are some of the things I would like people to think of make sure that the person who is coming in is not just someone who has got a theory about story telling but is able to tell stories and practice, set in a process and this is not really I might be talking about storytelling because that's one of the things I do but it could be any-thing, design thinking just the two day design thinking course run by Ideo is not going to make your people design thinkers there would be five per cent who are self-starters who will sort of do their own experiments, you need to put a deliberate practice program into process.

DJ: Who are the three storytellers you admire in the business world and what about them stands out?

IC: What about I will answer the question because I do have favourites what about them stands out is that they have been natural from whenever, no one has come and taught them, they have been using stories and the first name in India that comes to mind is R Gopalakrishnan. Now, RG has been the storyteller I didn't have that label but I knew was one of the few guys I would actually die to go and listen to whether he is sort of lecturing my department or my team doesn't matter because yes I always thought he was inspirational but today when I look at it I know that each of his speeches or each of his presentations were peppered with stories, and what are stories instead of giving you just

the opinions I am giving you I am giving you the experience behind that opinion and so he is very good at it and as these people they have figured out this thing about brevity, they have figured out how much of the details of the story you need to keep all the stuff that I teach in the book seems to have come naturally to them, so one is R Gopalakrishnan. The two other are stuff that anyone would vote for as being great communicators Steve Jobs, Jeff Bezos both of whom are intuitively great storytellers and of course you know that Bezos has told that his company has to stop making power points and use only narrative structures so those are the three names that I would talk about.

DJ: And with Steve Jobs clearly that convocation address where he talks about three stories that you have mentioned in the book that stands out.

IC: That's just one of those examples, he has multiple, he has his beautiful story that's going up in one of my next videos the weekly videos that I do where he talks about how when he was very young he went into the yellow pages and called Bill Hewlett or Packard and I don't remember exactly but I think he was making transistors and he needed some parts and he say those days even the big guys name was there in the yellow pages in the directory he just called his direct number and said I am 12 years old can I get few spare parts? And he said yes and he gave it to me in fact later he brought me in to do my summer training there and on the transistor line I learnt so much and because of that I really believed that one of the difference between people who get it done and people who don't is the ability to ask he could have just stopped at, Steve do you have an advice? Yes people should ask don't be afraid of asking you will go in through one ear it will go out through the other I will never remember but when he tells that tiny story did you or did you not imagined a 12 year old boy picking up an old telephone and making a call, you did, it went up to that part of your brain that deals with visuals and emotions and that's why you will remember the story.

DJ: And Moving to Bezos any particular story stands out?

IC: My favourite is the one that he used in a convocation address, so he says you know Bezos's parents married very early and so the grandparents what they did was every time Bezos would have a summer holiday when he was really young he would go to the grandparents farm so when he was around 12, one day he was in grandparents farm and they were out for a drive, grandfather was driving grandmother was sitting on the co-passenger seat Jeff Bezos is driving in the back and the radio is playing some song and it then had one of those anti-smoking messages and in this one the announcer talk about how each puff makes you lose so many minutes in your life now Bezos sits in the back and starts making estimations, he estimates the number of puffs his grandmother takes because grandmother smokes and is smoking currently in the front seat and how many puffs she takes to finish a cigarette, how many cigarettes she has in a day how many years she has been smoking and at some point he pops his head in front and says grandma with that last cigarette you just lost seven years x days, x hours of your life and he says the next reaction was something I didn't expect because I expected them to turn and say Jeff you are so intelligent, you did that in your head instead my grandma just broke down crying and my grandpa parked the car on the side of the road he got out and he called me out I didn't know what to expect because he has never raised his voice forget raising his arm he walked to me a little further from the car and then he said Jeff someday when you grow up you will figure out that it is much harder to be kind than to be clever and that's what you need to work on and he gives this advice to people graduating in that convocation address. What a powerful story. I for one will never forget it now he could have said, its important as you become business managers going out you are, just because you graduated from this fancy university

you think cleverness is the only important thing you need to be kind and it would have gone through one year gone after the other but as he told the story it stuck.

DJ: In summary what would you like to tell the guests about playing to potential?

IC: All of us have a lot of messages that could be our unique understanding into a situation or problem etc. unless we find ways that that translates into the way that people get it, can remember it and share it with another five people, that worth of the message is lost, so you have the potential to change people's mind, change a way the whole organization works or a team works because you have an insight into something that is different from someone else but your ability to communicate that is going to make the difference between whether it was just an idea or whether it was action and one of the easier way to do it, is to use the stories and story structures.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I hope you found the conversation purposeful.

I am reminded of one of the off sites I was at when I was at EgonZehnder. This must have been around 2012 or 2013 when Rajeev Vasudeva, the co-founder of EgonZehnder in India was appointed as the Global CEO of the firm. We were in Goa and Rajeev attended the offsite and decided to share his story of him starting EgonZehnder with Sanjiv Sachar in 1995. He spoke about his initial years of consulting and how they stumbled upon Executive Search. He spoke about how he got in touch with multiple firms and how a set of co-incidences led them to tie up with EgonZehnder in India. He spoke about his early days in the office where he would be the consultant and the peon in the office cleaning up when rain waters had flooded the office floors. He spoke about the early sacrifices he and his partner Sanjiv made how they went after their initial clients and picked the people he worked with. He must have spoken impromptu for about 45 minutes about his journey and we all listened in rapt attention, the only sound apart from Rajeev's voice you could hear at that time was the sound of the waves. Through his story, he touched upon things like Entrepreneurship, Excellence, Putting clients first, Collaboration and several other things that were core at EgonZehnder. But that was the first time, I had experienced a story from an authentic place that left a mark on me and drove home a lot of the points around Corporate culture, something a precise PowerPoint hadn't done till then.

If I may add another piece to what Indranil says. When we share from our lives, we are authentic in how we share, and we become vulnerable, then people start relating to us differently and the level of trust you build suddenly goes up a notch, whether it is at home or at work.

My next guest at the podcast is Tarun Khanna (TK), a Professor at Harvard Business School. He talks about his book 'Trust – Creating the Foundation of Entrepreneurship in Developing countries'. He talks about how entrepreneurs in emerging markets often have to create the conditions to create apart from focusing on their business.

TK: *"interesting thing about both these instances of Devi Shetty's heart hospital and from microfinance from around the world, if you pose the simple question to let's say a classroom of hundred undergraduates or a hundred CEOs of companies or hundred policy makers in any country and you say how many of you think that it is absolutely and categorically unethical to make money by selling services to the poor that's one extreme position the another extreme position is how of*

many of you have no problem at all saying that as long as you follow the law and are ethical in all possible respects and letter and spirit if you can make money by selling to the poor, you have no issues with a company being very profitable. So two extreme positions and I tell the students that they cannot hedge their bets, they cannot be both, they cannot be in the middle, they have to choose one or the other this plate is invariably 50-50 invariably, it doesn't matter whether its wall street types or as we say in Delhi Jhola Walas stereotypically JNU people, doesn't matter, no matter who you pitch this to, it will be 50-50 so it appears that all of us, my hypothesis, as an academic is to say that we appeared to evolved pretty hard wired notions in our heads of what is legitimate and not legitimate to do with catering to the poor bringing the market to serve the poor and again I say my class that it's not for me to make value judgments, I wear my heart my sleeve and my actions tell you where I stand on this debate but if you and your god have a different answer then god be with you go for it."

DJ: Thanks for your time and your listening. Look forward to having you at another conversation of the Play to Potential Podcast.

Signing off, this is Deepak Jayaraman. To know more about the Coaching and Transition Advisory work I do, please visit transitioninsight.com

End of transcription

Nugget from Tarun Khanna that is referenced: [Business model choices](#).

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- 37.01 Indranil Chakraborty - Transitioning to solo-preneurship
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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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