



Guest

Rich Fernandez is the CEO of Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute (SIYLI). Prior to this he was a Director of Executive Education and People Development at Google.

SIYLI began as an initiative in Google in 2007 when a team of leading experts in mindfulness, neuroscience and emotional intelligence developed an internal course for fellow Googlers. It quickly became incredibly popular within Google and given the interest outside Google was so great, SIYLI was set up as an independent Not for Profit in 2012. Since then SIYLI has become a globally recognised programme and continues to work with Google as well as other Corporate, Non-profit and Government Organisations around the world.

In our conversation, we spoke about Rich's take on Leadership Development in a "rocket ship" such as Google and talk about the distinction between performance and potential, something that several organizations mix up. We talk about the various types of attention (open, focused and meta-attention) that we need to cultivate and discuss how one could think about baking in a meditation habit. We also discuss other themes such as response flexibility versus reaction, meta-distress, building a positive mindset, 3 levels of resilience and more.

This conversation is likely to be of value to any leader (specifically in the tech world) who is at the cutting edge of disruption and innovation and is trying to build his/her leadership capability as he/she scales up the organisation.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 41st conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. This is 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 and help them play to their unique potential. To know more about my LEADERSHIP Advisory work, you might want to visit the ABOUT section at www.playtopotential.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.

In that context, I am excited to announce my guest for this Podcast - Dr Rich Fernandez, CEO of Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute. To provide some context Search Inside Yourself was a course that was conceptualized by Chade Meng Tan whose job title at Google was Jolly Good Fellow. Meng curated wisdom from various fields and was instrumental in putting together a course "Search Inside Yourself" for Googlers on enabling mindfulness and happiness. Given the success within Google, he set up a Not for Profit – Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute where he is still the

Chairman. SIYLI has done mindfulness and emotional intelligence work with leaders across 100 cities in 30 countries so far. Coming back to Rich, he was heading Executive Development at Google before he became the CEO of SIYLI.

In our conversation, we spoke about his insights on Leadership Development from his days at Google. We quickly move on to talk about some of the elements of the Search Inside Yourself Programme, including how we should think about mindfulness, attention, resilience, happiness and more. At some level, given the nature of business challenges that we are all grappling with, the answers have to be found a few levels deeper within ourselves. While there is a lot of this type of content out there, what really struck me was the amount of research that has gone into the design of the programme and how they have taken best practices from a range of people including Tibetan Monks and have vetted different approaches with data to pick the ones that make sense. Without further ado, over to my conversation with Rich.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I'd like to talk about your insights from your days at Google where you heading executive development, I'm curious about Leadership Development in that digital age if I may use the term as compared to how traditional economy companies think about it? What are the big differences in the terms of the key levers that are the different in the digital context vs. the industrial context?

Rich Fernandez (RF): As many of you know I have led the function at Google that was looking after exactly development executive of education for the senior leaders at Google for number of years and I left there some years ago but what I saw then and what I still see now, especially compared to I guess more traditional companies or economies is that in the digital economy disruption and innovation happens at a very quick rate and accordingly leaders need to be agile to meet that kind of disruption so that when we talk about leadership development and growing the leadership capabilities of people it's really about how to help them meet those disruptive challenges in an agile way. So what's different about leadership development is that there are no simulations there are no long range strategic plans that are going to effectively address the dynamics of highly disruptive market place so if you think about it for example 10 years ago Uber or if you are in China DD you know this thing didn't really exist and now they are major players and major drivers of digital economy ,shared economy... so how do you kind of meet those challenges what we find is that in order to help people stay agile we really had to help them think about things like very effective cross-functional collaboration the ability to kind of map and navigate relationship quickly, so that they can get things done across lines and in fact it's much more of a matrix organization then then it is really kind of a vertical organization people like to talk about vertical integration a lot but really, it's a lattice or a matrix of web relationship that need to work really effectively so people go quickly and meet disruption as it occurs. So what we don't see often in this context when we do leadership development I feels like business simulation. You know I use to work for more traditional economy companies, financial services companies and in that type of environment business stimulation were great. At a place like Google it doesn't really mean much because a year two years from now who knows what the business plans keep really looks like so even try to model it.

DJ: And one here is about let's say education, exposure and experience as three levers depending upon the kind of behavioural change you are driving at are there let's say the key dimension along which you think about developing leaders in a place like Google?

RF: You know certainly the education piece is important so they have the fresh hold capabilities but we also look for domain expertise or leadership and then I think the third pillar that's really not so well understood outside of Google or something called "Goodliness" so this is quality of being able to interact and relate to your peers, to people who are around you on other teams as well in a kind of open, agile, warm way, may be not warm necessarily but just it's a quality of being able to work effectively across the organization and it's something that a lot of companies don't really understand and don't really assess for.

DJ: And do you codify that within Google do you spell out what "Googliness" mean?

RF: Yes, to some extent but it's more like criteria that filter for and you kind of know it when you see it as well. So you know of this person is going to be a good collaborator not so territorial but much more of a good collaborator. Obviously they have the threshold intelligence they have the threshold domain expertise but then what are these attributes around effective relationship and that is something that's not very well known outside of Google or even really understood in a lot of companies in my opinion. They are just a lot of companies just try to hire the best expert in the field and they don't look for other quality.

DJ: Just segueing to a related theme Rich, in the context of defining potential of a leader I am curious about how you think about that and more specifically like you know like you said "you know it when you see it" how do you see the different inflection point as you rise to top in Google let's say Director to VP to the next level, What shifts in each of this point?

RF: In an environment, tech environment usually at the time I was at Google where you and we look at directors those are essentially the highest unit of the execution within the organization so they are still responsible for lots of execution and then we get into to the VP and above and it becomes much more strategic you know driving a lot a kind of innovation for the future and so forth. I'd like to think about potential in terms of really three things and this comes out of pretty robust body of research from the Corporate Leadership Council. I think they did a study I don't know a while ago now where they look that I think something over 10 thousand employees, across 15 different industries, 29 different Countries and they found something fascinating about potential and what they found was that often times we mistake high performance for potential. What they found was that in 71 percent of the time people who are high performer were not high potentials but conversely something like 93 percent of high potentials are also high performers. So that's a little bit if you just think about that for a second so roughly 70 percent of high performers do not have the potential to go to the next level they are really good at the position they are playing but that doesn't mean they are going to be a great leader but when you can identify those people there are high potential chances are they do have a track record of success and in fact that research and some other organizational research you know from Google and other places have suggested that its things like agility which is the willingness and ability to take on new roles that greater complexity and so for if promotability which is the ability to kind of step to the next level and lead through that next inflection point and then finally a track record of success that the performance piece. If you combine all three of those chances are very high but you are looking at someone who has high potential.

DJ: And for a development prospective in a tech context you spoke about agility a couple of times how do you move from figuring out what the area of development is to really changing behaviour

what have you seen work effectively in Google context in sort of moving from cognition to behavioural change?

RF: Google and a lot of other tech companies are data driven places and so likewise in terms of leadership behaviours you want to look at the data so there was a very useful tool called operate feedback where the all of the direct report let's say individual leader would give feedback formally on a survey to a specific leader and that would form part of their performance reviews. So it's really easy to see how the effective they are being as leader and then being able to use that added up point to... to then grow and develop and when you get in to the develop side of things because there must be assess part of it which is gathering the data and then there is the develop part of it when you get into the development piece of it it's really about giving them the right coaching and the right environment to talk to their peers and so when we use to talk about coaching... peer coaching which sets form for that to happen and then also just getting the right type of learning around leadership like what attributes of leadership are they needing to grow is it an emotional intelligence, is it adaptive leadership, stakeholder management more effective negotiation then you have specific solution that you can ensure that they are connected to once you have assessed what are the specific areas to work on.

DJ: And the solution would be courses or MOOCs or those kinds of things or the experts?

RF: All of the above. Blended learning, peer learning, in person learning it's the full spectrum, one on one coaching so it really is a full spectrum development that is available to them. It's investing in your talent you can't just say to people "you need to be better at this?" Actually, it supports them and provide them a scaffolding and that the everything from an app all the way through one on one executive coaching.

DJ: And may be flipping sides from a career management perspective again you operate in the Valley I'm curious about the notion of staying relevant given the velocity of change how do people in the Valley stay relevant? What do you see them do effectively when you look at people that are sort of reinvented themselves multiple times what are some of the meta themes that play out?

RF: The domain expertise, the technical skills are critical but as you start to kind of grow as a leader are you able to then harness the team around that technical capability and help them move through set of disruption and work through different model together so if you think about a specific unit let's say something like Google Chrome and Google Fibre like how do those two play effectively together it's not enough to be a great player at the browser but you have a partner here who wants to create high speed internet and so how do you kind of partner together effectively. I think when the leader start to demonstrate those capabilities to build these collaboration across functions they start to develop expertise that beyond their single domain that they are known for and they can become sort of leaders like more transferrable skills sets that they can then take that kind of to another venture potentially if they were... Basically what I am saying is it is important to have deep expertise but you also have to have horizontal expertise and the ability to play across function so that you can you know kind of potentially move to a different place effectively work in that adjacency.

DJ: Let's move to the book "Search Inside you" Rich is the ok with you and to the organization. I read the book by Meng with a lot of interest would love to explore few themes but before we dive in, I'd love to get a sense of the origins of the program where all does it draw from and give us a sense of the why behind the program and some of the foundation pillars of the program?

RF: Well one thing that happen when you are in a hyper-growth company like Google that's trying to it has his validation goals is that life on a rocket ship can be difficult let's put it that way so stress

level are high conflict can become exacerbated, you now all of the natural human challenges and emotions that we feel in the course of life and work are magnified in a situation which you have this kind of high growth, hyper growth company. I think at Google people were interested in finding solution to be resilient and remain agile and they started primarily at the neuroscience around this and one of the things that neuroscience started to point you as there is a way that you can train your brain way of a set of use of mental health habits to help promote focus and mental clarity and mental stability in the face of many challenges and the short hand term for this would be mindfulness using the skills of mindfulness. Now this is based on neuroscience the actual working of the different networks in your brain and one thing they find in neuroscience in the past couple of decades is that the set of skills called mindfulness skills which have a lot to do with attention and directing of attention, awareness and perception and then self-regulation and management which then also spills into relationship management in the interpersonal sphere. All of this can be trained and, in the brain, and the brain will actually change once its start taking up these mental exercises. Again this might not be surprising I mean you know I think this podcast of course is going out in India a place where pretty much mindfulness was invented so this is probably may not be news for folks there but the sort of empirical neuroscience of it is fairly new at least in the in the west and so what and so what they are interested in Google was looking at the ways that this mental skills change the brain and prepare you for the kind of environment in which you find yourself and help you succeed in that environment. So search as in search like Google search but inside yourself was born "Search Inside Yourself" that's the name of the curriculum that really when combines the skills of mindfulness together with neuroscience and emotional intelligence as the outcome because what we realize is people aren't so interested in doing a stress buster as much as they are in developing a new kind of intelligence which is emotional intelligence and so SIY (Search Inside Yourself) is a mindfulness based emotional intelligence curriculum that was developed specifically for initially for Google engineers and then brought this for the Google Population.

DJ: And today talk to us a little bit about the mission at Search inside Yourself now clearly its setup as an independent entity working with organization around the world so the purpose of the listener gives us a sense of what's the vision here?

RF: So, we started seeing as we rolled this curriculum out we started seeing tremendous success so thousands of Google employees were going through it every year and it occurred to us that you know there could be a great benefit we started getting a lot of request from other organization offer this to them and so you know we had a conversation with the head of HR my boss at that time, a man named Lazlo Bock and we agreed that there would be a weather we could create a separate non-profit organization and I called Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute or SIYLI.ORG and its mission would be to offer this curriculum to the world. In effect to make mindfulness and emotional intelligence practical and accessible and really take this approach of science based and evidence-based tools to help people thrive. Some six – seven years ago we rolled the institute out of Google as a separate stand-alone non-profit organization and began offering this broadly to the world. We still share the IP with Google this curriculum is still run within Google every year against the thousands of employees take it but now other organization through the Search Inside Yourself Leadership Institute can also experience the curriculum for themselves.

DJ: In the book Meng talks about few types of attention one is the distinction between the attention and Meta attention and the other was the difference between the open and focused attention so I was curious with these distinctions. Could you talk a little bit about what these are and more importantly now why should we be cultivating some of these different types of attention?

RF: Attention is simply the directing of your mental faculty to an object of focus our attention and this is something we all of us do every day. But something that was found in the research is that

about half the time 47 percent of the time our minds also wander away from what we are doing. So that maybe we may be focused on something specific we also get distracted quite easily on average about half the time. Meta attention, if attention is the quality of directing the faculty of attention or focus Meta attention is becoming distracted and then knowing that you are distracted. In some ways you could say it is attention of attention knowing when your attention has wandered knowing when your mind has wandered and then bring it back the full attention. That's the difference between attention and Meta attention. Focused attention is direct attention is that quality like I said focused directed attention but when we talk about focused attention in the book and in our curriculum, we talk about it as a skill that you can develop. There is a set of exercise you can use to cultivate it and that is simply, it's very similar to meditation you can sit and watch your breathing for example then we use the breathing as an object of attention when we are cultivating focused attention because first of all it's available to everybody and you don't have to believe in anything to focus on it. You can focus on your breath. Studies have shown that when you do focus on your breathing you activate the attention networks in your brain the direct attention networks in your brain. Focused attention is an exercise to cultivate sustained attention over time. Open monitoring as you pointed out is a slightly different exercise there is a quality of attention there but it's not directed it at a single object its actually kind of opened up and directed much more broadly at much more about a noticing the perceptual field. Allowing yourself for example to simply notice what you notice? I am not speaking in riddles. I'm just trying to explain what it means to like notice your own perceptions that is open monitoring? What are you thinking in this very moment? What are you feeling in this very moment? What might physically you be experiencing this very moment? Your attention moves to all of these different factors throughout you know moment by moment, second by second becoming aware of how your attention is shifting and moving is the process of open monitoring.

DJ: Back to meditation Rich the people I interact with in general conceptually everybody knows it's helpful and quite a few even get started with it but I the biggest slippage of the leakage I see is over the medium-term right people struggle to make it a habit. What's been your experience in installing this is a habit for the long term in people?

RF: What I would say is ritualize it and routinize it so make it a ritual or routine so personally for me it's the first thing I do when I wake up, I literally get up from my bed, splash water on my face and I go down stair to my office and then I sit in the morning. This is early morning before the sun is up, I mean early riser and before my family is awake, before I check my email or open up the laptop or look at my phone or anything it's the first thing I do and then second thing I do is I brush my teeth. So, to that level of routinization, it's to that level of ritualization for me. It's just the hygiene factor I call it. So, to the extent you can make the formal practice of meditation hygiene factor it will help make it a habit in your life. The other suggestion I have is something we offer in a curriculum which is make it a set of integrated practices. When people think about meditation, they think about having to do exactly what I have just said which is sati side you know x block of time and you know sit in a certain way and close your eyes and protect the space for formal practice. But there is also a way to practice mindfulness and meditation in an integrated way. For example, as you move through the course of your day, integrate it into your day between meetings if you need to walk to the rest room make that a walking meditation. I am actually serious about that. Become aware of your bodies is it moves for space between your office and the rest room. Become aware of your foot fall, become aware of the felt sense if your body. How are you feeling actually in that moment? Or take the opportunity to focus on breath or this being in India this Podcast you know if you have a "Mantra" that you are familiar with or particularly like us that. And I say "Mantra" and there is an often a religious component to that but here what I am referring to is really finding an object of your attention to train your attention upon it whether be "Mantra" or breath or walking or sensation you can really do this throughout the course of your day. I was driving to work today and I was focusing

on my breath not so much that I wasn't able to drive but there but when there is a red light when I was stopped in traffic in and out for three breaths, I noticed my breath. Next stop like same thing integrated practice is also helpful one.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. This segment reminds me of a recent conversation I had with Dr Ramachandra who has studied Gandhiji for several years. When I asked him about how Gandhiji preserved his mind-space when the world was clamouring for his attention, this is what he had to say.

RG: So, I think, for example, spinning. Now, spinning is an activity in which you are, of course, doing labour. You are breaking down the caste barriers via you, Baniya, spinning. In fact, in one of his court appearances, he's asked about his caste and he says farmer and weaver. You are spending time with yourself. And, of course, silence. Walking is another activity in which you are whatever you call it, slow food and slow this, right? And the day of silence that he adopted was also a way of withdrawing into himself.

DJ: If you want to listen to this piece, you could go to Nugget 39.09 titled Inner journey in my conversation with Ramachandra Guha.

Thank you for listening. If you find the content purposeful, Please rate and review on iTunes or whichever platform on which you are getting the podcast whether it is Google Podcast Player, Spotify, Saavn or anything else. If you wanted to browse through content by a specific theme, say Mindfulness, you might want to go the Curated Playlists section of playtopotential.com where specific nuggets are organized by themes. Now let's get back to the conversation with Rich Fernandez.

DJ: Look for pockets of opportunity as your day's plays out. Just a quick comment on dealing with meditation or even building the muscle of attention in the digitally let's say stimulated world we live in. What are some of the again what do see people do in effectively sort of leveraging the upside of digital while protecting themselves from the downside of digital if I may use the term?

RF: There are specific ways that people manage or mismanage their attention. So, the digital world sucks our attention it absorbs us and I don't mean to say that in a bad way there are tremendous benefits from our information economy. But if we let it be unbridled it's sort of like eating a delicious feast but never stopping to eat. You kind of become an over fed and you can grow little sick and so it's really about managing attention. I'd like to say it's actually an attention economy where we have to parse out our investment of attention prudently think about it like a financial portfolio you want to balance your investment prudently and so you want to allocate time that is off line, you want to compartmentalized time so I never take out my phone for example almost never take out my phone when I am interacting with my son who is 12 years old but that has been true for me for a very long time. Now once in a while I'll get a ping you know if I have senses of working something urgent is happening at work I will check it but there are kind of set times in which I check and that's not said that I'm offline for the huge amount of time but when I'm offline I'm really offline at dinner with the family the phone is not on the table or anywhere near where notification can distract me. I think it's really about managing your attention and and compartmentalizing effectively. And believe me I'm online sporadically when I'm home from work through the evening because I have a job where I do

have to monitor but then I definitely cut off at a certain time as well. I'm usually asleep by in bed by 10.00 and I'm not on my device any more. Until after my meditation in the morning.

DJ: Now clearly the sense I get is unless we draw hard lines if we just let osmoses then it's just gone suck rest of the attention so that point is well taken. Moving to mindfulness in the book Meng talks about listening, looping and dipping I found those three-term interesting in the context of mindfulness could you elaborate on this for the listeners on what do you mean by this term in the SIY context?

RF: So it's really simple so listening is what was said and just listening to what was said looping is playing back what you have thought was said so literally Deepak if you said something right now like you just asked me like what is looping and dipping listening in the context of the book is that what I heard you asked me? So I'm playing back to you just to confirm that I did understand what you were saying because times we listen not to understand but to provide our own solution or drive our own agenda right and so what we were saying with mindfulness and listening is first of all listen to what's actually being said loop at back to the person to confirm you heard it. You can simply ask what I heard what you say is such and such and dipping is something yet again which is what you heard that what you think they felt when they said it because beneath the content of what's being said is often times a perceptions or a feeling and sometimes you want to get it that. So let me give you an example someone recently said to me who I work with said to me well the reason the metrics went that way at that point of time was simply because we had a reorg. So it's just a bad state of affairs so what they said we had a reorg. It's a bad state of affairs and so I said wait so are you saying we had a reorg you feel like we had a reorg and it was a bad state of affair is that what you are saying yes ok so what do you feel about that because it seems to me you are pointing to that as some sort of good cause so tell me like what is your sentiment about that right and they were frustrated and they felt like they had been disempowered by this reorg and that became the root of discussion and that was the dipping piece so I wasn't just working at the level of pure content because there is a person who is saying those words and if you and if you dip into what that person's experience of the actual situation is you dip you can learn a lot more and that is a form of emotional intelligence that something we teach in our curriculum.

DJ: I want to move to a journaling Rich and in the book, I found an interesting statistics right Meng talks about a study where a group of people who were laid off, they wrote to themselves about their feeling for about 20 minutes a day. I don't have the statistics in front of me but they did much better than the non-writing control group in terms of getting the next job. I'm curious about the notion of journaling what's being your experience about journaling and more importantly want should people write about? How important is it and also comment a little bit about how does one bakes the habit as we like we discussed earlier on a couple of other things?

RF: Your presiding some studies by James Pennebaker and others who found that journaling how has helped all sort of outcomes physiological but also very tangible in terms of like finding new job after losing them. I think the part of the factors that lead to that are that when you journal you are basically capturing and encoding your thoughts about a specific situation rather than letting them basically fester to use a very untechnical term and so when you doing this very concurred exercise of staying how you feel stating what you hope for stating your goals you are really making them very clear in your own mind. I think it really help to navigate towards those positive outcomes. One thing we know also thing we know also another bit of neuroscience is that what they found is that people have a better memory for things they have written down then that which they have typed in class room setting that's bit of finding in neuroscience and what's neuroscientist have found is the reason for that is that because we can type faster than we can write long hand and we can type almost at the speed of what's being spoken and so basically what we are doing is we are just essentially

quickly processing but not encoding what's being said. When you write something long hand like when you journal you actually have to articulate the entire thoughts in your heads and they become encoded in your memory in a much stronger fashion. Basically, you are programming yourself in another sense of the word when you journal you are programming your brain to perceive a situation through a certain lens or perspective and it becomes much more real and concrete and, in some ways, you start to live your way into that if that make any sense. For Journaling to get started or to have bit sure of it make it more of a habit thinks about a prompt today I feel "dot dot dot" And then just write for 2 minutes without stopping stream of consciousness. I think the SIY have some prompts for a good journaling prompts that you can use. It simply thinks like thinks that annoy me are? I am at my best when? I hope that? Just these open-ended questions can really be wonderful to start your journaling practice and just like meditation you have to do it to experience benefits.

DJ: And what do you see people do in terms of reviews what's been written is that important at all or even the act of writing itself is good enough or do you see people coming back every week or every month to really make sense of what they have written?

RF: It seems like the act of writing itself is the most important piece but then in reviewing furthering encodes as well so I think the research had much more to do with the actual act of writing but what we know is that people can reinforce that through reading that. So we always ask people to read what they have wrote after they have done it in our curriculum and it really helps bring a lot of clarity. For the listeners I would just invite you to try that you don't have to do this extensively but for three or four days of a week, seven minutes, and five minutes even each. Give yourself a prompt and that might my best when? I hope for and just let yourself write and experiment with this and see what emerges it might surprise you.

DJ: Do you see people picking one prompt and sticking with it across time or do you pick different prompts at different points in times do you have a view on that?

RF: NO, I don't see consistently what people do? What we like to encourage people to do is to find the prompt that's most relevant for you if that point in time. If you are feeling particularly frustrated during a certain period write about things that annoy you so that you get clarity on those. If you are hoping for a new situation think about your work or life would be like if you exceeded your expectations in a year. That's one exercise I actually do it at the beginning every year I do that exercise myself. If my life exceeded my expectation in the next three years my life would "dot dot dot" and I just write that. I write that every year at the end of the year. As I setup for the New Year. So just think about situationally what would be useful prompt for you and then just get going writing on it.

DJ: That's so profound I think in the busy lives we lead just stopping to reflect I think is one of the thing that everybody realizes the important of but it just the work crowds out most of the things so points well taken.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. In my coaching work, when we are trying to drive behavioural change, I often urge the leaders to develop some sort of a journaling habit. I like the distinction Rich makes between writing with a pen or paper versus typing. I also like the phrase Rich uses when he says that by journaling, you begin to reprogramme yourself and you act your way into the new version of you! I thought that was really powerful.

I asked one of my earlier guests Vinay Sitapati (VS), the author of the book – Half Lion, a biography of Narasimha Rao. When I asked him about what gave Narasimha Rao the ability to process the complexity around him, this is what he said.

VS: “Narsimha Rao’s ability to be introspective, to be inward, helped him sift the day into what, or to put it in statistical terms, to be able to sift the signal from the noise. That is the first thing that introspection taught him. One is, it taught him don’t trust anyone except your diary, which is a pretty good skill in politics. Second is, that you should be able to sift the signal from the noise. Who are the people you meet every day? How many people are being honest? How many people are lying?”

To give you just one example. One of the diary entries which I have in the book is from 22nd May 1991. This is the day after Rajiv Gandhi has been killed near Chennai. Narsimha Rao — who until then had been basically eased out of the Congress and was about to become a monk in a monastery called Kutrallam, in Tamil Nadu, and was closing his bank accounts — suddenly realized that by virtue of being the least ambitious man in the party, he’s prime to be Prime Minister of India. The diary shows 22nd May, he’s back in Delhi, he’s in 10, Janpath, where Sonia Gandhi and Rajiv used to live, and pieces of Rajeev Gandhi’s body — they were just pieces, they were not the full body — are kept there and all the Congressmen are around the body pretending to cry. Some of them were actually crying, while actually trying to manoeuvre to see who would succeed him. And he has this wonderful passage about how Pranab Mukherjee, who was in the boondocks then but would later recover to become President of India, wheedles up to him and says, ‘We think you should become Congress president,’ which is the proxy for Prime Minister of India, and Narsimha Rao says, ‘I immediately told him that I am not the right person, knowing full well the kind of person he is. I also gave him the name of ND Tiwari for Prime Minister of India, knowing that he was even less likely a candidate than I am.’ I think, the introspection in the diary allows him to do that. It allows him to reflect over the day. If Pranab Mukherjee came up to me and said, maybe you should be Prime Minister of India; I wouldn’t stop to ask what his angle is. So, the introspection gave him that ability.”

DJ: Of the leaders that I have studied, either through my Leadership Advisory work or at the podcast, if I had to distil what are the 3-4 habits that stand out for these leaders, I would like to believe that Journaling would be one of them. Now, let’s get back to the conversation with Rich Fernandez.

DJ: One of the other things that struck me in the book was the notion of the grasping an aversion and what struck was Meng says that this accounts for close to 90 percent of the suffering and the related theme that comes up is the notion of meta distress, feeling bad about feeling bad so talk to us about what these terms mean and how one could deal with them?

RF: Let me see if I can put it in simple terms. Very often there are the facts and then there is the story we tell ourselves about the facts and it’s the story we tell ourselves the narrative that we tell about something that happened that causes us distress because often that narrative has to do with A) How poorly we did, so I’m grasping for a different outcome that I could have probably done or where pushing away that experience because we feel it’s difficult and not something you want to do with. In our curriculum what we often like to talk about is the ability to shift from this existential experience and narrative where you are all bad or you are all good or you are grasping or you are being averse to a situation to simply allowing yourself to notice that you are experiencing this in your body and that sounds a little funny but let me explain further. What we are really talking about is shifting from an existential state or a perception of an existential situation where for example you are failure that’s a pretty popular one a lot of people have that narrative in their head this happens that I’m a failure, I’m terrible that is an existential state that you are saying about yourself and you will experience suffering if you let yourself stay in that state. When in truth you might have had a set back

and you experience emotions as you resulted that set back but those are emotions are actually just emotions in other words, they are physiological processes happening in your body. The moment you are able to move from that existential state to this experiential process that has to do with the situation you are able to get a little bit of distance from it. You are able to have a little bit one small degree liberated from it so that you can see it happening to you and within you and it's valid and it's real and you don't deny or suppress it but having the ability to just notice that this is the process that moving within you and through you. It sounds terribly and esoteric but it's actually based on science because most people start to suffer and tell stories about themselves based in their feeling but if you look at what a feeling is and emotion it's a set of physiological reactions that happen in response to our environment or to thoughts we have sometimes and if you see emotion as a process and you really able to see that and take that meta perspective or exercise meta cognition then you are able to free yourself a little bit of it from it and navigate it. So, let me give you a concrete example because this might seem like I'm talking about riddles. So recently we did not meet a certain financial bench mark and I started doing that narrative like how did I do this. This is a complete failure. I can't believe that I miss this particular thing would have changed everything of we have seen this and I felt myself berating myself and along those lines until I realized wait a minute, I'm feeling upset about the fact that this was missed and I'm having the experience of stress and frustration around it but it's just an experience that I'm having at the moment and it doesn't need that we can't remedy this things doesn't mean we can't learn from them but I'm just at the moment experiencing frustration. So I note it and in noting it starts to diminish somewhat and I'm not governed by it anymore. I'm not defined by that experience and my mood states starts to shift actually as well. So I'm not just an angry grumpy leader because we missed financial targets. But one whom is like starting to develop this agility, this ability to learn, this ability to see the next path, see around the corner and actually look at other solutions so it's a way to kind of manage yourself moving from the facts or moving away from the story that you tell yourself about the facts and simply dealing with the facts directly. Hope that it makes sense to the listeners it's trying to explain a very complicated concept.

RF: Make sense it's about sort of looking at things it's like stepping away from the movie and watching the movie play out rather than being consumed by the moment.

RF: Can I draw a linkage here because we started this podcast with you asking me what is the difference about leadership in Silicon Valley and this the very thing I'm talking about when you dealing with disruption and then you need to be agile? You don't have the affordance of being able to be stuck in frustration and being able to stuck in narratives about failed solutions you need to be agile and this is very much how we develop this skills.

DJ: You are also even saying agility in terms of how you are thinking about yourself and how you deal with is not just agility to business development but its even agility in terms of how we deal with our emotion and situations

RF: That's actually the bed rock because it actually informs your world view and how you show up as a leader so this skill is something that we teach we call it response flexibility the ability to respond rather than react to challenging situations and most people in business face challenging situation all the time but if you are only reacting to them and being very hot and angry all the time you are being responsible actually. You are not being balanced and you are not being clear headed and that's the difference being response flexible in the face of challenges and disruption is a critical skills for business leaders and for technical leaders and it does very much have to do with your own internal landscape and that's why we call the curriculum Search Inside Yourself because we believe that to be an effective leader and a thriving person a lot more you need to develop those skills of awareness and self-knowledge and self-management in order to be effective.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. A similar point came up in my conversation with the chess legend Vishy Anand (VA). He talks about how the context changes suddenly when you get to move 40, where extra time gets added and unless people are present in the moment and re-adjust their minds, they could end up making big mistakes.

VA: *"I will give you one quick example, I would often get to move 40 and move 40 is significant because it's the end of the first time control, which means that you get a fresh amount of time on your clock and normally your time pressure is over. But a lot of people, the moment, the time between move 32 and 40 is so tense and they are so caught up in it, they are not able to stop till make the 41st move anyway, and especially once upon a time I was very prone to this error. And I was also prone to an error that when I had half-an-hour and my opponent had three seconds, I would try to go fast so that he wouldn't have remaining time to think. It doesn't take a lot of intelligence to stop yourself and see that if you play fast do not give him any time to think, you are not giving yourself any time to think either."*

DJ: In a world with rapidly shifting context, I guess, building response flexibility rather than just reacting might just be a superpower that can make a significant difference in the quality of decisions you make and determine how nimble you are as the context around you changes suddenly. To hear this nugget, you might want to go to my conversation with Vishy Anand specifically to nugget 21.05 where he talks at length about how the human mind works at a conscious and a subconscious level, and how we can unlock the full potential of the human mind. Now, let's get back to the conversation with Rich Fernandez.

DJ: Moving to a different topic you talk about three levels of resilience. Inner calm, Emotional resilience and cognitive resilience and once again I found it interesting that you broke it down into this three normally people talk about resilience at a headline level but it was interesting to see these three different levels of resilience talk to us about what these terms mean and how we can build this muscle?

RF: Well inner calm is the first thing that we talk about earlier which is the skill of mindfulness and being able to manage your attention and something happens when you are able to direct your attention to the present moment, the breath, Mantra whatever you call it where you become calm and less reactive because you are just simply grounded and focused so that's the habit of inner calm is the habit of mindfulness. Emotional resilience happens when you are able to become aware of the emotion that you are having as you are having them. This has a little bit more to do with open monitoring that I was discussing earlier. You are noticing what's arising within you as an emotion as it's arising in real time and it allows you then to take that distance that I was talking about to exercise that response flexibility when you are aware of your emotions you are able to manage them, when you are aware of your emotions you are able to respond rather than react. Now some listeners might say well look Rich it's really important to react I'm in a business where I have to react and I would say to you unless you are experiencing an existential threat its gone always be far more effective to respond rather than react because responding doesn't mean going slow. Let me give you an example to make this really concrete and really clear have you ever been in airplane and experienced heavy turbulence, you have right and so the listeners have too who do you want in the cockpit in that moment somebody who is reacting and just alarmed and on fire or someone who is calm, competent, clear headed and knows exactly what need to happen and when it needs to happen. You want Captain Sully Sullenberger. That I actually met the man he came to give a talk at Google and he is that way when you meet him like one of the calmest most grounded people but

what does he say actually he says that he trained and this is by the way for the listeners who aren't familiar with Captain Sully Sullenberger he is the man who landed the jet plan that was flying over New York City. It flew through a flock of geese so they lost all jet proportion because the geese flew into the engines and burnt them out so in the space I think I have about 3 minutes to make a split second decision to land the airplane on the Hudson River it was the only available large open space over New York City but he thought about it very calmly. So, I'd ask you to Google it or YouTube it you will see interview with him he explains it. But how did he do that he says he trained his whole career for it. He said I have 30 years as pilot and so I just know the routines. I knew what needed to happen and he just calmly proceeded to do that he didn't react and become over blown or over-whelmed by the situation and this is why we talk about emotional resilience is being a key quality of a leader in a digital economy and then the last piece Deepak because you asked me about this was cognitive resilience and this is simply your mental outlook its very simple it's one of two things its optimism vs. pessimism. Studies have shown that people that have positive outlook and that are optimistic are people that see possibility and they feel agency they like they are able to act against those possibilities and they them-selves can have a positive impact on making possibilities or reality that's what an optimist does pessimist tend to be people who actually take a disempower mentality they often feel like they are victim they often feel like injustice simply exist and there is very little you can do against it so why bother you even trying to form the cynicism and it's not particularly effective as a leader to be a turbo pessimist because you feel like you can actually make progress against difficulties and you can cultivate by the way cognitive resilience by actually doing things like expressing gratitude and looking at positive qualities, positive attributes in your lives those around you.

DJ: You spoke about inner calm cultivating inner calm but, on the emotion, resilience coming back what you have said about.... Any observation on how people can cultivate emotional resilience?

RF: So, this is the process starts with open monitoring and developing that self-awareness, emotional processes that happening in your body as they are happening so this is a type of meditation you can do this is a type of mediation and simply allow you or read the book or take one of our program we teach you a kind of become aware of thought feeling, sensation and just kind of move through those different domains of experience you could do sight, you could smell, touch just notice go through the categories of experience and just simply notice what is happening for you in that moment and that will then build the skill of open awareness so that when you do faces situation where you are triggered in real life and have this difficulties you are immediately aware of what you are feeling. If you can name it then you can actually manage it very much like Peter Drucker said you have to be able to measure it to manage it. Well in this exercise of emotional resilience you have to be able to name it to then be able to manage it and you respond to it verses react to it and if you ask most people when they are really triggered, when they are really pissed off, they can't really explain what they are feeling. So the more fluent you become in your own emotionally literate you become about your own emotions, your own internal ecosystem then the more emotionally resilient you will be able to be and you develop again that skill by being able to monitor your own experience as you are having it.

DJ: Moving on to a different theme in the book which really caught my attention and it was Gottman ratio, it's a ratio of positive to negative experiences for a long-term relationship to flourish and I read something like a 3:1 or a 5:1 which sort of says that 1 negative experience wipes out 3 positive experiences there is something to that effect. So, I'm curious to hear about your take on that and therefore what does it mean in terms of how we influence?

RF: Let me just reframe that a little bit because it's a little bit more along the line and we notice negative things in our environment far more readily than we do positive ones and that simply

because from an evolutionary prospective we have to develop what's called this negativity bias. In other words we had to assess threats in our environment that could harm us and be really good at doing that at a higher ratio than we could the pleasurable once because pleasurable once we could go without but if we fail to assess that's what we could be dead so if fail to notice there was a bear hiding behind that rock we were dead if we walk by a blueberry bush we can find another blueberry bush the consequences weren't as dire. Our brain had become hard wired to notice negative impulses at a rate of above 3 times as much as positive once so what is that matter in relationships and in leadership it's because people are sort of tuning mostly to bad stuff and so you have to overweight the good so you almost have to reverse the ratio, you almost have to like do 3 times of many positive things to counteract the negative things that they experience. So for children praise, acknowledgement, recognition same with employees. Like recognition is a critical thing for employees how much recognition do we give as a post to criticism, how much praise do we give as a posed to performance feedback and so in the context of the organization and teams it's really critical to have a pretty much positive working environment because then that leads to another wonderful and a very important team effectiveness factor which is physiological safety. Google did a study and they found that the most top quality of the most effective teams wasn't that they were geniuses but that they had a physiological safety with each other. Project Aristotle correct. This was named because we are greater than the sum of our parts. It's not about individual contribution it's about how we work together as a team and if there is a sense of physiological safety where you can take risk and fail together safely and be supported in having taking a risk and failed and encouraged to continue on. Mark Zuckerberg famously said move fast and break things and learn and that critical piece learn is what is critical here because it's really about taking the risk and feeling safe enough to often fail. In a disruptive innovation economy and failure has to be okay. I live here in San Francisco and we have a whole conference called failure con. It's all about failure so what do we learn from epic failures, it's really funny but it's actually a really good idea because it allows for a failure to be OK.

DJ: And back to psychological safety, what do good leaders do? To foster a psychologically safe culture in a team in the organization?

RF: They are authentic and so they talk about their own vulnerabilities openly so they have the moral psychological safety as well they have the model being willing to take risk and failing and they have to be open and authentic this is not something that is easy for a lot of leaders, it's not something they teach in business school, this is not something that even intuitive because leaders feel like they have to play a role but think about that term psychological safety. Whose psychology are we talking about? What is psychology? It's about the human psychological makeup, right? And so, it's about being human which means being authentic and sharing those difficulties and vulnerabilities now you don't have to disclose everything about yourself always, but you have the model what it means to be willing to take risk and to fail and to find another solution and to learn what often doesn't help is negative reinforcement. When you are trying to create psychological safety fear, anger, these negative emotional states do not promote psychological safety. I am just going to say that because its true people need to feel safe they need to feel comfortable that they can fail and if you are easing negative reinforcement and fear and criticism it's not going to promote psychological safety not some people can argue you can get better results when I managed through those other things in your calling negative states, it's very true you will get results but they won't be the disruptive breakthrough results, I think that you are going to see at places like Google, where people are googly, it is a challenging environment it's not like people are taking it easy. I am not suggesting that psychological safety is everybody is just relaxing, for the contrary everybody is working super hard they are also taking a really big risk in working on a really hard problems because they feel safe enough to do that they don't feel limited and deal .. by this negative environment

that's been created and again that negative environment will get you some results but I would argue not sustainably and not next level results like you are seeing in places like Google.

DJ: In summary few words of wisdom from you how listeners can play to thier potential.

RF: Well of course I am going to say search inside yourself which means to say develop the skill because they truly are skills awareness and self-knowledge which will ultimately also leave to effective relationships and the idea of that awareness is this skill is critical because if its skill like all skills it can be developed there are habits there are ways and exercises that you can do to develop your awareness which will again increase self-knowledge and then the ability to use that knowledge to grow effective relationships and in my experience working with the executives and teaching this curriculum offering this curriculum around the world really self-awareness and self-knowledge and relationship management are things that are very often neglected in favour of more cognitive and more technical skillsets then like I said before awareness and soft knowledge in relationship management is a skill and I would indulge everyone to develop that skill in order to play to potential as you like to say.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the conversation as Rich as I did. Sorry, I couldn't resist that one. 3 big takeaways for me in this conversation.

- First is the notion of agility Rich talks about; we often talk about how we respond to the VUCA world by being agile etc. It was interesting to hear Rich talk about agility at an individual level when it comes to how we deal with our emotions; that was an interesting take on agility for me
- The second insight that stayed with me was the point about meta-attention. We often spend a lot of time thinking about getting the focus right but I guess, working on the guard rails or the steering wheel the way you see it is as critical as we hope to move forward in an attention economy that is trying to distract us every step of the way.
- The third insight that struck me was the point he made about journaling and how you can act your way into a new version of you by reprogramming yourself. It was interesting to note his views on writing on a piece of paper versus typing. I hadn't quite thought that the way we capture information would have an impact on the effectiveness of the process.

Thanks for tuning in and I look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversations at the podcast. To be intimated when I upload new content, please go to bit.ly/signup2p2p. To access any of the sub-themes that came up in the conversation such as resilience or mindfulness, please visit the Curated Playlists section of playtopotential.com. If you find the content purposeful, please share with people that would find this of value and rate and review on podcast platform where you listen to this. Bye now.

End of transcription

Nugget from Ramachandra Guha that is referenced: [Inner journey](#).

Nugget from Vinay Sitapati that is referenced: [The reflection habit - decoding signal from the noise](#).

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Rich Fernandez- Nuggets

- 41.00 Rich Fernandez - The Full Conversation
- 41.01 Rich Fernandez - Leadership Development in the Digital economy
- 41.02 Rich Fernandez - Origins of SIY
- 41.03 Rich Fernandez - Attention and Meta-Attention
- 41.04 Rich Fernandez - Developing the meditation habit
- 41.05 Rich Fernandez - Benefits of Journaling
- 41.06 Rich Fernandez - Meta-distress and Response-flexibility
- 41.07 Rich Fernandez - 3 levels of resilience
- 41.08 Rich Fernandez - Positivity and Psychological Safety

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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