



Guest

Raj Raghunathan is a professor of Marketing at the McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin, where he relies on themes from psychology, behavioural science, decision theory and marketing to explain consumption behaviour. He also studies the impact that people's judgments and decisions have on their own happiness and fulfilment.

Based on his research, he teaches a very successful online course on Coursera on Happiness (named A Life of Happiness and Fulfilment). His book (titled, If you're so smart, why aren't you happy?) was released in the US, UK, and India in 2016.

In our conversation, he speaks about his journey to researching happiness and his take on why so many people around us who are smart and successful but not necessarily happy. He talks about some common pitfalls people get into and some perspectives on how we can prioritise (not necessarily pursue happiness) in our lives. He is an alumnus of BITS Pilani and IIM Calcutta.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 56th Conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman and I work with leaders as a Coach, Sounding Board or as a Transition Advisor as they navigate their journeys. In this series, we feature conversations from leaders from different walks of life on three themes - leadership, transitions and careers.

My next guest is Professor Raj Raghunathan from the McCombs School of business at the University of Texas at Austin. He is an alumnus of IIM Calcutta and has pursued a career in Marketing in academia but he started researching happiness after he saw several smart and successful people around him being unhappy. He teaches a very successful online course on Coursera on Happiness (named a Life of Happiness and Fulfilment) and has authored the book "If you are so smart, why aren't you happy?).

Before we dive into the conversation with Raj, a quick heads up on the next guest at the podcast. It is Jennifer Garvey Berger, an accomplished executive Coach who has been studying complexity and leadership in a complex world for several years. You might want to look out for that conversation that will be published in a couple of weeks as it has some really useful insights that could help us cope with the current COVID-19 situation we are in.

Now, let's dive into the conversation with Raj Raghunathan.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Raj, thank you so much for making the time on the Play to Potential podcast. Excited to be talking to you.

Raj Raghunathan (RR): I am very excited to be here Deepak as well. Thank you very much for inviting me.

DJ: And Raj we'd love to talk about your insights based on your work in happiness but before that I'd love to talk about your journey and how you got here. You started out with degrees in Engineering from BITS Pilani and then you had an MBA from IMC and an early career in Lintas the advertising agency. Talk to us about the transition to academics. How did that happen and what drove that decision?

RR: Yeah, so I think you and your listeners are going to be a little bit disappointed to hear the story perhaps, but I really did not choose to come into academics. I just wanted to get out of India. We are talking of the early 90s when really we did not have a whole lot of opportunities to travel abroad and for me that was very, very important, it was a top priority in my life to travel to see places and everything. And because I am from a middle-class family more or less the only way in which I got to travel abroad, I thought, this was the only way I could do it, was to actually get a PhD because Masters and undergraduate degrees you have to actually pay money. Sometimes you did get a scholarship as a Master's but as a PhD you are guaranteed a stipend and my parents did not have enough money to send me abroad for me to travel around. So, I came here to the US really believe it or not just to travel abroad. But, once I got here something really interesting happened, which was that I really fell in love with studying. I was never really into studying. I mean, I was smart enough to get into BITS and IIM and everything but I would just basically kind of fake, you know, once I was inside, I would just do the bare minimum possible to get to the next level. But in the PhD program I discovered that I was studying topics that were of inherent interest to me. So, for the very first time I was studying not for the sake of getting a job or grades or whatever, I was studying for the sake of exploring your topic and so that's how I ended up here in the US.

DJ: Fascinating, definitely didn't expect that. And even in your journey as an academic you have transitioned from marketing, I think to studying happiness and psychology and leadership and some of the related topics. How did you gravitate towards these topics along the way?

RR: So, I was always very, very interested in happiness at a very personal level, and I suppose that you could say that that's what led me to come to the US. And, after getting a degree in IIM, I would say that most people are very keen on taking advantage of the grade degree that they have to get into a good company and earn as much money as you can. Even back in those days before India started really taking off, there were jobs that were paying quite well. So, the fact that I chose to not do that and forgo that earning potential and opportunity for earning to come and spend time here in the US five years right to get a PhD is a decision that most people wouldn't take lightly, but I wasn't taking it lightly but it was a no-brainer for me. For me, I wanted to travel abroad and that trumped everything else and so I ended up doing it. Now, it's a good thing that it ended up being a good decision career wise too I would say. And a similar kind of a phenomenon happened after I started teaching Marketing in the Marketing department. At some point I realised that hey, I don't know if what I am teaching is actually helping people out at the end of the day. I am giving them tools and skill sets needed to persuade other people to buy stuff that they may or may not need and that's leading to consumerism. I don't know the marketers are really happy about being somewhat manipulative agents and I don't know the consumers ultimately happy buying things that they don't need and the Earth is definitely not happy. So, that was one of the thoughts in the background of my

mind and then I went to India, took a bunch of MBA students from McCombs School of Business to India as a part of a course called Global Connections, and I remember last day of that trip in 2006 I think it was I turned around to them and asked them, how do you like if I offer a course on happiness? Because for me the ultimate purpose of education is to make the world a happier more fulfilling place. I want my students to be happy, I wanted them to make other people happy, and I wasn't sure that the marketing courses were doing it. And so, I turned around and asked them this question and to like one person they all said, to the very last person they all said that they would love to see a course like this. And that really did it for me and then I came back and I put my course and in a way it just took off more wildly than I would have ever expected. It has been 10 years since that happened since I had first taught the course, this was I told you in 2006 or 2007 when I talked to the students; it took me a good 3-4 years to actually offer my very first course to the students here at the McCombs School of Business. So, it's been 10 years since I have taught it and as you know there are two online courses now that I have offered. I go and teach the same course at ISB, I teach it both for MBAs and for undergrads, I get invited to give talks to organizations on the topic and so it has really taken off in a way that I wouldn't have expected and of course I am not complaining, so it has been a good ride.

DJ: Lovely. And may be just going back to that piece around building capability, let's say the 3-4 years between when you sensed the demand from students and when you offered it, talk to us about how you spent that time Raj.

RR: Yeah. So, you know, this is back in 2006-07 and there was no university Professor, certainly no tenure track Professor offering a course on happiness anywhere as far as I could tell in the US. So, there was no real path that was already carved out for me, I couldn't buy a textbook and then just teach it from it. I had to literally sit down and read the papers and structure it in the way that I thought fit. So, it took me a while and I went in and sat in on a few courses that I thought were somewhat related to the topic and a couple of courses were very related to happiness, but they were taking an entirely different approach. I wanted mine to be very scientific, logical, and amenable to a kind of philosophical inquiry if you will a rationalistic approach as opposed to a faith-based approach. So, it took me a while to wrap my head around it and figure out what the content was going to be and how I was going to structure it. I have to tell you that, if somebody were to have sat in on that course now and they sit in on the course now that I teach now, they wouldn't be able to see any similarities at all. So, it has changed even in the last 10 years but because there was no other course like that I had to spend a good amount of time figuring out what it is that I wanted to say in the class.

DJ: Got it. And what are some of the dimensions in which it has changed since you mention it? What has changed?

RR: So, I would say that one similarity is that it's a course that starts out with what are our basic motivations in life. And then I end up saying why do we have these motivations and how achieving them makes us feel happy and in the very early days, I had these kind of buckets and I said that you needed to have some level of basic need, some level of accuracy need I called it at that point in time, some level of achievement need, some level of relationship need and I conceived of all these as being buckets that are kind of hanging in space or on a pole if you will, that is a horizontal pole, it's all hanging there and the more one bucket gets full, you need to also fill in other buckets otherwise it gets lopsided and it's not a very happy life. And, it was kind of weird now that I think back on it I don't know why I was thinking that way about these things. I felt that you needed to have a balance between all these things in order for you to be happy. And, maybe to some extent it's true but I've kind of now the way that I have structured it, it basically boils down to three very, very important goals. I call them MBA goals, Mastery Belonging and Autonomy and then I have a couple of other

things that are very important but those are the three big goals. I have gotten rid of this whole idea of the buckets and they need to be in balance and I had I think seven buckets so it has changed quite a bit.

DJ: Got it. This reminds me of the work of Stewart Friedman who was on the podcast a few months back. He talks about Self, Work, Home and Community and he talks about some sort of a harmony, not quite the buckets that you spoke about but at least those four dimensions.

RR: Yeah, I would say that, that in a way was my idea as well that these need to be in balance or harmony, you could call it harmony. Now, I don't know if I think that way about it. I do think that it's nice if they are in balance or every one of them is fulfilled but I don't necessarily think that having one fulfilled and the other not fulfilled is worse than having nothing fulfilled. So, in that way my thinking has changed.

DJ: So, let's dive into your work on happiness Raj and let's start from ground zero. How do you define happiness and I am also curious about what are some of the common misconceptions you see in the way people think or define happiness and maybe we pick it up from there?

RR: Yeah, sure. So, for me happiness personally is a state of light-heartedness and it's kind of state of joy if you will, about embracing life and feeling good about life and having a sense of joie de vivre that French talk about and it comes with a light-heartedness. So, even if you are doing something serious not to take yourself too seriously but that light-heartedness, I don't think in my definition should come at a cost to either your rationality or your sanity or at a cost to other people's happiness. So, I don't want to sacrifice compassion in order to be happy myself. Okay, so that's how I personally define it for myself, but more academically I would say that you can think of happiness as being kind of sourced in four different kinds of sources. So, obviously I think we can all agree that happiness is a positive emotional state. Now the question is how does that state get triggered and what are the qualities of that state. And I would say that there are at least four different sources that I can think of. One is a pleasure, just sensory positivity, eating something tasty, smelling something good and so on. The other is just positive emotions because something good is happening around you, you are in a loving relationship for example, or you achieve something that makes you feel proud and we can think of at least 10 maybe as many as 20 or 25 positive emotions, including gratitude and awe and humour and interest and pride, I already mentioned pride, serenity and so on. Then there are two categories that I think are very interesting which seem uniquely human to me and one of those is sense of purpose I call it. So, this is engagement in an activity that is so deeply intrinsically motivating for you that you lose track of time in it, you experience these flow states and that is a source of positivity and then you can think of what I call meaning which is the satisfaction that comes from contributing to other people, helping them out, and all of us have this desire to be agents of positive change, even if we don't recognize it, even if we are hard-core, I don't know economists, not to kind of throw them under the bus or anything. But everybody has even if you really believe in this idea of self-rationality, I mean this idea that you want to enhance your personal goals, I do think that you have a deep desire to help other people out. And, now lots of new studies are coming out and maybe we can talk about a couple of those but basically that is the fourth category, the satisfaction that you get from helping other people out. And I think you can define happiness as the positivity that comes from one of these four different sources and sometimes... and this is where it gets interesting in my opinion and may be complex in somebody else's eyes, but you can have a kind of mixture of both positive and negative in the sense that in the quest for contributing to other people maybe let's say not even people, animals, protecting animals you might have to take on a fight, you might have to put up with anxiety in facing lobbyists for example, or certain interested parties in order to fight for the rights of animals. And so, in the end it's a meaningful thing to do, but it comes at a cost to maybe your positivity but it's still a better life

than to not take on that challenge. So, that's... I don't know if that is in the ballpark of what you wanted me to talk about.

DJ: No, absolutely and maybe to make it real Raj, let's talk about a couple of segments, right? One is the students that you teach, may be just to take a reference point people in their early 20s or late 20s and the other is your peer set, I am guessing 15 plus or minus, right? If I may use the term midlife broadly. As you look around what are some of the themes where you think people get it wrong in the way they frame it for themselves?

RR: Yeah. So, one way in which people get it wrong and it's not a very important way or it's not a big concern but they do I think get it wrong is that they think of happiness as being ephemeral or fleeting or frivolous and not worthy of pursuit. I think that you can think of happiness as an umbrella term that captures a lot of different types of positive emotions, not just pleasure, which would make it I agree somewhat superficial or frivolous and ephemeral but also these other sources that I talk about of pleasure and in particular... sorry positivity and in particular meaning and purpose which can be quite deep and long-lasting. Another way in which people get it wrong is that... first of all, I mean this way that I talked about it's not a big concern because you can just replace the word happiness with say fulfilment or positivity or as some researchers do subjective well-being. So, if it's a definitional thing then you can just use an alternative term and it is not a big concern. But another I think more important concern is that people think that happiness is... they don't really want to be happy or something like that, and I think that that is a bit of a concern because it turns out that happier people are more kind to other people, they are also more healthy and they're also more functional, they end up achieving more, they are more creative, they are more objective. Lots of functional benefits that come from being a happy person and they are foregoing that by not prioritising happiness and prioritising success instead, which is a common phenomenon that happens that people go after money and all the extrinsic yardsticks of what is considered success and sacrificing their own happiness. And maybe at some level that is okay, we use to say that everybody is got to follow this but in the quest of that they end of hurting other people too, they become too greedy and at a personal level maybe more prone to divorces and things like that, but at a societal level causing more harm for future generations or to animals or to poor people and so on. So, that is one problem and maybe at another level another misconception that people have is that pursuing happiness and this is the other extreme, so one set of people deny or decline happiness, but the other set of people become overly keen on achieving it and that is a misconception as well in the sense that that is not the way to enhance your happiness level. So, the important thing is to strike a balance is to prioritise happiness, but not pursue it. And it's a bit of a difficult balance to pull off and what it involves is to identify a set of things that reliably make you happy and then make those habits in your life and then forget about it whether it actually makes you happier at or not, don't chase happiness. But in order for you to evaluate and get to what set of things make you happier on a reliable basis there is a phase in which you got to monitor how happy it makes you and whether it makes you happy and so on. So there you are kind of concerned about and measuring how happy you feel compared to how happy you expected to feel, but once you put a set of habits in place I think it is very, very important not to chase happiness because that ends up reducing your habits.

DJ: Got it and maybe before we dive into some of these topics Raj, going back to the term what gets measured gets managed, and you talk about some of the people going after extrinsic measures. Let's take money as one of the examples that is easy to measure where you stand. How do you measure happiness and more specifically is it something that... it is more of an inner recognition that you are happy or do people around us notice or both? Give us a sense of how you think about measuring happiness.

RR: Yeah, so there's a lot of work that got done between I would say in 1980s or 85 or so mid-80s to mid-90s and a lot of the researchers were very interested in happiness, but they were also sceptical as to whether you can really measure it. Like you mentioned money seems much easier to measure, it's quantifiable but happiness seems like a subjective experience. If I say I am 9 out of 10, is that the same thing as if you say you're 9 out of 10 and so on. So, they ended up doing these studies in which they measured happiness through what are called self-reports basically the simplest way to measure happiness is to ask people how happy they are, for example, on a 10-point scale and then they looked at whether those measures that people gave are highly correlated with other measures, other more "objective measures", like for example, looking at levels of serotonin or dopamine or endorphins in your bloodstream or cortisol for that matter, which ought to be negatively correlated with happiness. They also looked at people self-reports versus what other people that were close to these people said about these people's happiness. Let's say I say I am a 9 and if you ask my wife how happy is Raj, if I am not pulling a number out of thin air, I am actually kind of aware of how happy I am, and I am coming up with a number that's actually valid then you would expect to see a higher correlation between my self-reports of happiness and other people, particularly people who are close to me, their reports of how happy I am. You can also look at brain scans, you can look at certain areas of the brain that tend to get lit up so to speak, if it's more active, there's more blood flowing to those parts of the brain, certain parts of the brain are more well developed, the left prefrontal cortex, for example, is more well developed. So, what the research has ended up concluding is that these self-reports are pretty valid. They are quite highly correlated with these more objective measures of happiness than would be the case if they weren't valid. And so, they ended up concluding that the simplest way to measure happiness is also a reliable way to measure happiness. So, that's how I go about also doing happiness studies. I just measure happiness; I measure people's moods using relatively standardized but simple measures of happiness.

DJ: Got it. And in your work, you actually say that intelligence is possibly not related or possibly borderline negatively correlated to happiness.

RR: Right, I haven't done any work myself on this so I don't claim that I am really knowledgeable about this, but to the extent that I have studied it in terms of other people's research on this, it doesn't seem like there is any correlation between standard yardsticks of intelligence like, IQ, education levels and happiness levels. So, there is a bit of actually qualification here between being uneducated let's say that you did not even go to any school or college and having an undergraduate degree you are going to be happier with an undergrad degree, but beyond it, it seems that it doesn't really help any and in fact getting a PhD lowers your happiness.

DJ: What changed that at the undergraduate level? What's a delta?

RR: What's a delta between uneducated and the undergraduate?

DJ: Yeah, in the sense yeah, is it just the economy you cross or economic hurdle?

RR: Right, so, what are the calls for the change in happiness, yeah? So, I do think that you have more opportunities. So, one thing that we know for sure, this may be the biggest determinant of your happiness is whether you have access to basic needs or not. If you look at the happiest countries in the world, they tend to be countries in which most of the population has access to things like food and a roof over their head and education and medical attention and transportation and so on... basically the countries that we call socialist countries. Finland, which has been number one for three years now in a row, is an example of that. So, I think that education up to undergrad especially compared to somebody who doesn't even have a high school degree, they are going to do better in terms of access to basic needs. So that might be a big reason for it for sure and of course also think

of other associated reasons, which is a sense of self-worth self-positivity, the kinds of people that you tend to hang out with who tend to be more intelligent perhaps, better company in terms of being engaging, you are doing better most skilled labour. So, there's just a variety of things that go together with being more educated than just having a high school degree that is going to be positive for you.

DJ: Got it and it's interesting you say that once the undergraduate, after that there is no significant difference between further levels of education.

RR: Right. So, that's what I remember from these studies and I have to say that what is undeniably true here is that there is lots of people who are not just very well educated and are smart, but are also very successful by conventional yardsticks, in terms of fame, money, power, access to resources and so on status and yet are miserable people. In fact, I'd be surprised if every one of the listeners you have doesn't know at least one person like that who is really wealthy, who is really successful by conventional yardsticks and yet to the extent that these people know them really well, they also know that they are deeply miserable and so that is a very interesting phenomenon for me.

DJ: And moving to a different topic Raj you talk about abundance mindset versus scarcity mindset and the link with happiness, right. Talk to us a little bit about how you think about these two and the link to happiness.

RR: Yeah. So actually, this is a good context to talk about this one study that came out. It was summarized in an article in the Atlantic magazine. It came out in 2014 and the title of the study, the article was "secret fears of the super-rich" and I believe it was a Harvard study, I am forgetting who conducted it or Princeton study, but basically they went around interviewing these high net worth individuals and in order to qualify as a participant in the study you needed to have 25 million dollars invested in financial instruments. So, this is money that's on the side so to speak, this is money invested in things like hedge funds or in other kinds of financial instruments. This is not counting your house, not counting your cars, not counting your other assets. And they interviewed them to ask them what are some of your big fears and one of the biggest fears that these people had is that they don't have enough money. Okay, so I know it sounds... and it's easy to point fingers at them and say that I wouldn't be like that, if I had 25 million dollars, I would definitely not be greedy for more money. But we all know that almost at every stage in our lives we do end up feeling that, hey, you know what more money might be actually good for me okay, and a part of that it comes from comparing ourselves to other people. As you rise up the social ladder so to speak, the company that you keep changes and so your comparison point changes too, whereas when I was in India, for example, having a swimming pool in my own house might have been like something that was completely out of reach to where I am living now I actually don't have a pool in my house but I do have a hot tub. But it doesn't seem like that's out of reach at all. And so, it definitely seems like oh, yeah, if I had enough money then maybe I can do that and I can add maybe a little movie theatre in my in my house. So why should I have to go out and mingle with the hoi polloi so to speak, I can just watch these movies in my own home in the comforts of my home and so on. So, your aspirations catch up. So that is a very interesting finding that despite having so much money these people were feeling that they didn't have enough. They were operating from a scarcity mindset is how I would put it. And then you had the opposite end of the spectrum that is covered in this movie, this documentary called Happy, I don't know if you've seen it, I think it's still available on Netflix and you can watch it, your viewers, whoever is following this podcast can watch it as well. They start out with a scene in the slums of Calcutta and the slum dwellers are all people who pull rickshaws. You might have seen this. These are not like pulley rickshaws or cycle rickshaws; these are hand rickshaws. So, they are actually literally running around the city with passengers in their seat in the back and sometimes these people are so malnourished that they don't even have... they have bones sticking

out of them and they don't have enough access to resources to wear shoes. They are running around bloody feet reaped in and the researchers go to the slums and interview these people because they are very intrigued by this phenomenon where these people don't even have proper homes to live in. They are living in little slums and their homes are basically tarpaulin sheets pulled over four sticks with holes in them so that when it rains it's leaky and it's like miserable okay and yet they are all smiling and if not happy at least content. So the researchers are flummoxed by this site and so they go and ask them how can you afford to be content and happy, and I am paraphrasing what they say, but they basically say something along the lines of, you know what, we are taken care of, we are taken care of and they believe in God or they believe in some kind of a spirit and they say that whenever we need anything really desperately we end up getting it. Maybe not in the way that we conceive of it may be not immediately but we end up getting it and we have a good sense of community. Everybody in the slums takes care of each other. On the days I don't make a good tip somebody else might make a good tip and so they feed us and likewise we return the favour and so what to complain about kind of a thing. So, in other words, their life circumstances are characterized by scarcity not just plain vanilla scarcity but abject scarcity and yet they have if not a mindset of abundance at least a mindset of contentment. So, no prizes for guessing which of these two groups of people is happier in the sense of who needs to take anti-depressants just to stay afloat, who needs to pop sleeping pills to fall asleep every night, it's the high net worth individuals, very, very interesting finding. So what I talk about as an abundance mindset is basically this idea that in your head you feel that you have more than enough and you would think it must be correlated with how much access to resources you actually have objectively speaking but in these examples that I just gave you it appears not to be. And certainly for people like you and me and for people who are listening to this I would imagine that most of them have enough access to enough resources that right now it's a question of whether you can convince yourself that you have enough, and you can adopt that mindset of abundance. And if you do you actually end up discovering... and I have to tell you Deepak I weren't somebody who was born with an abundance mindset or certainly was not nurtured in me and I had to logically figure this out at some level. And so at one point though I just decided, you know what, I am going to conclude that I have enough and I am going to operate in a fashion that perhaps is not like as abundance oriented as say Jesus might have been or some other Guru like that might have been or even people like Vinoba Bhave might have been. But I am going to in my own way progress towards a greater and greater abundance and that is one of the tasks that I have embarked on. And the interesting thing is not only does it make you a happier person it also makes you more successful, believe it or not. And to listeners of this, I would really highly recommend a book that I really loved reading, it's called "Give and Take" by Adam Grant on how... he cites some 300 papers in that book. It came out into the 14 bestseller, and he basically walks you through the logic behind why it is that what he calls givers rather than pickers or even matchers are more likely to succeed. In a nutshell, it has to do with what other people think of you, who would you like to support? Would you like to support as a person as a taker or a giver, right? So, controlling for your quality of work, controlling for how accountable you are, your intelligence, your education and all that you are much better off being a giver rather than a taker; that is somebody with an abundance mindset rather than a scarcity mindset. Maybe I talked more in answering this question than you wanted me to but hopefully that was...

DJ: No, no. I love Adam Grant's work as well and the distinction he makes between smart giving and un-smart giving and I found that nuance extremely profound to say... and he also says giving is a high beta choice right. If you don't give smartly you might end up at the bottom of the pile and as a doormat, but if you're smart, then you could be giving and successful rather than a trade-off.

RR: He refers to them as other-ish givers versus selfless givers.

DJ: Other-ish givers, correct. Let me... back to... we are just picking up on the piece you mentioned Raj. How do we rewire our mindset? And the reason I mention it is when I think about India, a country like India where you need... there is a certain level of at least some of the choices we have made in the path we have taken, it has required us to be competitive and a certain edginess often is required by the system for you to get to a certain point and then we suddenly flip the switch to say, you know what, you need to change from this and maybe going back that edginess requires a certain at least a mindset of scarcity saying if you don't make it here then this is your... you're missing out on a different orbit and suddenly you get to a point and then you need to behave differently with an abundance mindset. Do you see attention there or the paradox there in terms of how we need to flip the switch at some point and that's hard?

RR: Not really Deepak. I don't think you need scarcity at all in my opinion. I think what you do need is hard work, you need smart work, you need to identify something that you are intrinsically motivated by and the scarcity mind set we mistakenly believe is needed for us to put in that hard work. And if I did not have that scarcity mind set, if I did not have this feverish desire to overcome my circumstances and get out of the hell hole I am in, I am not going to succeed. And I don't think that that negativity, that insecurity, stress, anxiety etc. is needed at all. I think if you love what you do, you can very easily motivate yourself through that love rather than through that feeling of scarcity. I do think that there are certain contexts in which scarcity mind set is very useful. If you are in a war zone, if you are even in a slump like the slum that I talked about perhaps, but if you are in a middle class family and what you are going to end up doing is not fighting like in a war, physical fighting, but you are going to do intellectual work, creative work, I don't think the scarcity mind set is needed at all. And I don't know if you know this about Adam Grant, right? One of those stories is that he was a diver and he was pretty good and he got to the level where he was competing at the national level, and in one of the national competitions, the final one for the gold medal and stuff like that he noticed his competitor doing some mistake and he was wondering whether he should go and tell him that if you just correct for this you are going to actually be much better and he thought okay, if I do that maybe and I am going to help him and I am going to sacrifice my own gold medal, but it's fine, I'll go tell him and I did that and indeed that's exactly what happened. The other guy got the gold and Adam himself got the silver medal. The next year comes around and exactly the same thing happens with another guy, but he goes ahead and again bites the bullet and tells the other guy that if you just do this you are going to be a much better diver and the other guy ends up winning the gold again. So, Adam decides that well, you know, two times it has hurt me being a giver so I want to kind of focus on this topic and research it. So, he ended up not going down the diving route but ended up becoming a professor after pursuing a PhD and what he found is that givers in long run end up succeeding. In the short run, sure you help other people out, you prop them up, and they climb over your shoulders and go ahead, especially if they are takers, they are not going to help you back up. But in the long run, particularly in the kind of environment in which we live now, lot of social media and things like that word gets around, you are much, much better off being a giver. Again, I mean, I want to kind of point this out that being insecure, being anxious, being jealous, envious of other people and being scarcity minded can certainly light a fire under your backside to motivate you to do things and that can lead to success, but that success is going to come at a huge cost to your well-being and perhaps even to your long term success. It's much better to be on a solid much better platform of loving what you do, being nice to other people and I think that you'll see that not only does it make you a happier person it also makes you a much more successful person in the long run.

DJ: Talking about a different adjacent topic of abundance and scarcity, you talk about the notion of time scarcity or time abundance and you talk about the paradox here that more successful we are the more time strapped we feel. Why is that so? I mean you also speak about a few ideas for

reducing the perception of time, right? One of them is sort of looking at awe-inspiring images and so on. So, I found this whole concept quite interesting. Could you talk about this a little?

RR: Yeah, sure. So, I am sure that everybody can relate to this. Certainly, people who are listening to you have access to internet and so they belong to a certain socio-economic class I would imagine. All of us end up feeling strapped for time. And I do this as a kind of a quick survey of my class in my MBA class and undergraduate class as in how many of you guys feel that you have more than enough time to handle everything that is thrown your way. Not a single hand goes up, okay, and then I ask the opposite question, which is how many of you feel that you have less than enough time to do all the things that you want to do and 24 hours is too little in a day and every hand goes up. And this has been happening for all the years that I have taught the class, maybe two or three people in all these years have not raised their hand for the second question but everybody is feeling more and more frazzled that life has become more fast-paced, they've bitten off more than they can chew, there is too many balls up in the air, some are going to drop and those are important ones and so on. So, we all face this sense of time scarcity and much of the time it's kind of like our own mistake, it's self-inflicted. We just... we have a FOMO as it's called "fear of missing out" and so we grab any opportunity that we get, we say yes to all the parties, we take on this, we take on that and often to our own detriment, and I have to say I myself am very guilty of this and in a way I don't mean to at all minimize the seriousness of the pandemic that we're facing right now Covid-19, but touchwood so far I have been healthy, my family has been healthy and of course my perspective is going to change on this if that were not to be the case. But I have to tell you that this has really been a kind of eye opener for me in terms of how much it has simplified my life. I can't go out; I can't take on all the assignments that I had lined up. I was going to go to Spain for something called the Happiness Walk, I was going to go give talks at different corporations and I just can't do it because of this lockdown. And it's been so good Deepak in terms of just this time affluence, having a sense of more time on my hands and also sense of connecting with my family, just sitting down playing board games for example in the evening, everyone's home, it's much, much simpler life and that's what it is, this time scarcity versus abundance or affluence as they call it time affluence actually makes you kind of rewind back to what we imagine to be simpler times that people had lots of times to go for a walk and reflect on their day's happenings and talk to each other about things that were meaningful to each other and so on and so forth. And that sense of time affluence is critical if you want to be happy. It's slightly separate from this mind set of abundance, which has to do with me feeling that I have more than enough of resources that I don't need to be greedy and self-centred and grab things but I do think that the connection is that time affluence leads to or promotes a sense of the mind set of abundance. And if you are time scarce, then I think it's less likely that you will find yourself adopting that mind set of abundance.

DJ: And may be just persisting with this for a couple of minutes Raj, and even linking it back to Adam Grant's work around giving during these times, there is... we have finite time in a day and there is an opportunity for us to say, there's so much more we can do and give and give and give and load the plate and that at some level could be personally draining. I think Adam Grant also uses the term generosity burnout at some level right, we talked about this. How do you think about that solving for personal happiness versus solving for impact? Again, do you see attention there? How do you think about that?

RR: Yeah, that's a great question. So in Adam Grant's book there is also this... he talks about this give and take that if you look at somebody who is a selfless giver, at some level you are talking about a person who is a selfless giver, who just takes on every opportunity that they get to give and they are giving indiscriminately to anyone who asks them for any help any time and so on. It's kind of sad, I mean because they are the kind of epitome of giving at some level but sad that they actually end up burning out faster. And so if you have a graph if you can imagine a graph in your mind's eye with

time on the x-axis and the positive impact that you have had on the y-axis, the selfless givers even though they are probably the poster children of somebody who is truly an altruist, they end up burning out faster. So, you can imagine in your mind's eye kind of a volcanic eruption of giving but that's it, it's over. Maybe two years, five years down the road it's over because they burnt out. Now if you think of somebody like who is an other-ish giver, who also takes care of themselves in the process of giving and if you look at their graph, they might actually end up having a career of giving so to speak of 30, 40, 50 years, and although it might look insignificant compared to the work in the initial three, four five years, if you fast forward 40 years and zoom back on that graph, you'll see that what they have achieved is far, far, far more significant. So, it's very, very important to take care of yourself. Here I think that there is also another concept that is very useful and that concept is the concept of self-compassion. So, taking care of yourself, treating yourself like you would other people who need help is super important as well, which kind of at some level perhaps to some people they are asking themselves, well, this is getting confusing now because I thought that being a giver is good and now you are saying that, take care of yourself then how do I know that I am not becoming a taker or at least a matcher, and there's no real hard and fast non-porous boundary between these things. Ultimately it comes down to intention at some level, am I doing this for the sake of societal benefit or am I doing it in order for my own progression and it's going to come at a cost to other people. And I think that if you're doing more of the latter then you are not a giver, you are not a true giver. So, it really comes down to you, at the end you have to introspect and ask yourself and be honest in answering this question, am I taking care of myself so that I can be better prepared for more giving in the future and the answer is yes, then you are being an other-ish giver and that's a very, very important thing to do.

DJ: Got it. And back to maybe just quickly wrap up the point around time affluence. You talk about two ideas for reducing the perception of time. Could you talk about the couple of nuances there?

RR: Yeah, so things that... I find that very interesting. So, I interviewed Melanie Rudd who is one of the co-authors on that paper that talks about time affluence after encountering images that induce a sense of awe. If you think about awe, awe is an emotion that we feel when we are confronted with something that is far grander than ourselves. And usually you would imagine that encountering something like that makes us feel little and belittled and we end up being humiliated or insulted or feeling like we are not powerful, not very positive. But in fact, being in front of I don't know El Capitan at Yosemite, by the way, I mean, I just saw this movie called Free Solo couple of days back, I highly recommend it for those who haven't watched it. So... or in front of the Grand Canyon or in front of the Himalayas, the mountains, rivers or things like that or the galaxy, we are just watching the Milky Way on a nice night inspires you with this feeling of smallness and somewhat kind of paradoxically that smallness is actually a good feeling and it makes you feel that, you know what, I think what it does is it makes you feel that life has existed, there are so many things beyond my control, there's so many big beautiful things, why am I worrying about things that are going on in my life and getting really stressed out and worked up about it. I am going to be gone in 80-100 years and let me just have a good time in the meanwhile. So, it kind of induces this sense of time abundance or time affluence in the short run. It's not a permanent change obviously, okay, but I think that it is a very useful hack. So, whenever you are feeling really stressed out, I think it might be a good idea to take a look at... nowadays we have things on YouTube so just look at size of the Earth compared to the universe, just Google something like that and it definitely works for me, it induces a sense of time affluence.

DJ: Just moving topics Raj here you talk about happiness paradox where you say that while it's often the final objective, we get distracted by focusing on the means rather than the end, right and you talk about the notion of leaving a lot of happiness on the table by the choice that you make. Could you talk to us about the insight here?

RR: Yeah, so in a way this is also related to some of the misconceptions about happiness if you will in the sense that we tend to... first of all most of us I don't think there's very many people who would disagree with this that we prioritize happiness, we think happiness is very, very important. By happiness again I don't mean necessarily only pleasure, but fulfilment, a sense of meaning, I don't think there's too many people who disagree that if it's not the top goal then very much in the top three, right up there. So, you would imagine that as people go about their daily lives, they are acting in ways that maximize that thing that they themselves claim is very important happiness. But what we've discovered is that people will say, that A between A and B, A will make me happier and yet when you observe people going about making choices between A and B, they routinely choose B. So that's what we mean by happiness paradox and I will give you a very specific example here. When it comes to relationships, we often know this that sometimes you can either be right or you can be happy. You get into a big argument with your spouse on something that is really worthless, whether you said something and they misremembered it and they are saying that you said it and you say no, okay and you can go on arguing about it or just kind of bite your ego and say that you I think you're right, I am really sorry. There's nothing that's lost by doing that. Of course, people then immediately say that what if I keep doing it, and then they take advantage of me. And maybe so in some instances that's true but in most instances, I think most of us are guilty of pursuing something that doesn't make us happy, doesn't make the other person around us happy that we care for and so in that indirect way as well reduces our happiness and yet we end up doing it. And it's not just things that have to do with being right versus being happy. It's got to do with chasing money beyond a point at which it's giving us happiness. We talked about, FOMO, so chasing opportunities beyond a point where you stretch thin and yet you want to grab on to this next opportunity to do this thing. Why? You know, what is it going to get you? We bite off more than we can chew sacrificing our own happiness, we want that next iPhone or the next gadget and so chasing material things, becoming materialistic, chasing money, chasing power, chasing fame. So, we end up exhibiting this idea, this phenomenon that I call the fundamental happiness paradox, which is a discrepancy between what we claim is very, very important for us, which is happiness and how we end up acting, which is we sacrifice happiness in the bargain or instead of pursuing happiness we end up pursuing other goals. So, we sacrifice happiness for the sake of other goals. So that's what I call the happiness paradox and that's the concept there. And of course, in the book I go through quite a few examples and I am happy to go through a couple of them here if you think that would be helpful.

DJ: Sure, I think a couple of examples would help.

RR: Yeah. So, one example is jobs. So, what we did with the University of Texas students are we had them read chewed up two job descriptions. So, one of the jobs was described as highly intrinsically motivating. This is the kind of job that you feel like every day when you wake up yes, I want to get to work but doesn't pay you a whole lot of money not that it's pittance it pays only pittance, it pays you enough for you to lead a decent life, not an extravagant life. And job B that is going to pay you a lot of money, it's considered a very prestigious job, but really the job sucks. I mean, what are you doing for work is demeaning at some level and you are surrounded by toxic colleagues. And we ask people which of these two jobs would you choose for yourself? And what we find to be really interesting is that most of the people say that the job A that's intrinsically motivating even if it's not going to pay as much is the job that I want. They say this especially well before the interview season has begun, and so what we do is in this study, we ask them about six months before the interview season here are actual job descriptions. One of them is going to be more intrinsically motivating than the other, and we take down these descriptions from previous years' job offers and their descriptions and we see a significant effect of prioritizing intrinsic motivation over extrinsic six months before. But come interview season it flips, it flips and people are much more likely to then choose during the interview season the extrinsically motivating job, the job that gives them more money even if it comes at a

cost to their sense of sanity or their sense of interest in the job. And the more prestigious jobs, the higher paying jobs, the more well-known jobs, well-known companies rather, those are the jobs that they end up choosing. And so it's in a way kind of very sad but also very powerful demonstration of the fundamental happiness paradox where even for things that actually matter to you a lot, your job, we end up spending a 100,000 hours on average at work, which is two-thirds, well not two-thirds but at least half of the time that we are awake on Earth, so not counting sleep time. We spend about a half one third to a half of our time at work and yet we end up choosing something that's not going to make us as happy. So, I can walk you through another example too if you want?

DJ: No, no this is good. And I used to be a search consultant for six years? So, this sort of hits home quite hard in the way it goes back to my conversations with candidates on how they think about choices and you are right. I was going to pick up from there and maybe link this conversation Raj to some of the work of Bob Kegan, who has done some work around adult development and I am curious about midlife and to use Bob Kegan's language a lot of people are moving from a socialized mind to a self-authoring mind. So, I guess what I was trying to get to was while you spoke about the experiment at an undergrad level in terms of how students respond to job description one versus two, how do we...

RR: We actually did the study with the... we did it with the undergrads too but this particular study I described was with the MBA's.

DJ: Now I was curious about how you think about this evolving as people age and specifically may be reflecting on this whole phase of midlife. Any reflections on what are some of the things you have seen maybe looking at your peer set maybe as a point of reference, any thoughts or insights here?

RR: So, one thing is very clear, I think that the midlife years are among our worst. I think the teenage years are the absolute worst, but after that our happiness tends to pick up a little bit and the twenties are very good, but the midlife years between 45 let's say and around 50 maybe 55, those are the worst. And one of the big reasons for that is that that's the time at which you can't delude yourself anymore that you haven't been as successful as some of your peers have been and you haven't achieved many of the life goals that you wanted to achieve. Maybe objectively speaking you are better off than what you imagined you would be but relatively to other people you are not and so there is a big gaping hole in the middle of you wondering where did I kind of run around chasing all this and here I am and I don't feel as happy, I am getting older, I have got a big belly now and you just end up not being very happy. And that's the reality, this is not among my peers necessarily, it's a reality around the world. This is what the curve show, the happiness curve across the ages. And I think that one of the interesting things is that it does take up after it, it goes up and one of the big reasons why that happens is that you end up reconciling whatever has happened and going past it and not being as concerned about it or worried about running after all the conventional yardsticks and competing with other people and so on. And one thing that I do want to say here Deepak is that earlier on you talked a little bit about this podcast being about transitions and career transitions and all that, so I do have some thoughts on... if you are in that age group say between 40 and 50 or 40 and 55 and you are discovering that this has not been a happy time for you, you are certainly not as happy as you thought you ought to be at this point and perhaps you also recognize that given everything I have I actually ought to be really happy and yet here I am not feeling very happy, I do have some thoughts, I don't know if you're...

DJ: We should talk about that now and now is a good time Raj to dive into that.

RR: Okay. So one thing is that... so I want to talk about three things that you can do if that is what you are experiencing that you are here and most of the listeners are probably going to be in this

category of people who have actually achieved quite a bit in terms of conventional success and access to resources and money and power and the status and all that and yet they have this kind of sense of emptiness. So part of that I think comes from social comparisons to other people and I think that there is a time at which you need to stop doing that or at least mitigate it to a large extent because if there is one really big killer of happiness it is social comparisons. It's easy to do, it's natural to do, it seems that sometimes it's helpful to do it because you get inspired by other people or you realize what's possible and so you chase that for yourself, but if it's a state in which you more or less constantly exist where you are comparing yourself to other people to such an extent that it has even become second nature to you, then you are really killing yourself at some level literally, because if you are unhappy you are actually not helping yourself in terms of your health, your physical health, so you need to mitigate it. And I would say that what is far more important than all these resources and comparisons to other people is having a sense of purpose and meaning. That is that feeling that what you are doing for work is intrinsically motivating. It is tapping into your core interests; it is tapping into and nurturing your strengths that you have built up over time. So that is very, very important and also the sense that you are actually helping other people out, be it consumers, be it your co-workers, be it people who don't have a voice in the system, animals perhaps or poor people from other... somebody, you are helping some stakeholder out. So, these two... at least one of these two is very, very important even if you are not helping people out at least are you really into your job. And if you are not doing that then I have three pieces of advice and this is all based off of other people's research. So one is that see if you can job craft, I don't know if your listeners are familiar with this term but it's basically moving a job in a more meaningful direction. I think that I am a good candidate to speak about it because earlier we talked a little bit about this. Why did I end up teaching a class on happiness? I think at some level I didn't know you were job crafting at that time but that's what I was doing, I was teaching regular marketing courses, I am in the Marketing department even to this day, but I felt a little bit uneasy about some of the larger ripple effects that the knowledge that I was imparting was having on the world at large. And so, I ended up concluding that it's not as meaningful for me to do that. And so, I thought to myself what would be more meaningful is to talk about well-being, happiness etc., so I ended up crafting job crafting. So that's one thing you can do. And people are often very surprised to learn that where they do attempt to job craft, they actually do not end up facing a lot of obstacles and they end up actually getting people open up new doors of opportunity for them even within their own firm and it doesn't have to be massive and big. You could be in Sales for example, and you discover that it is really making you travel more than you want to and you have family at home and kids and you are away from them and in the meanwhile you have gathered a lot of insights on what kinds of products people want and so you could actually kind of really help out in the R&D, in the new product group or innovation group. And so most people think that well, I have spent a good 15-20 years in Sales and who is going to accept me in R&D, there is no way that they are going to accept me, but you would be surprised if you just go and talk to your boss or to other people in the R&D department, even if it's only for a temporary period if you ask them to spend time for about say six months in that R&D area you might actually encounter a lot more receptivity than you thought. So that's job crafting. The second is of course that you move jobs and let's say that again with this example of Sales versus R&D, let's say that your company actually tells you that no, you don't have experience with that and we already have all positions full, sorry you can't do it. One thing you can do is to hang out with the R&D group, even if they don't allow you to actually take up a formal position there, just hang out with that group and say that you know what every evening I just want to spend one hour with you guys just to see what you are doing and just listen in. I am not going to actually work here but I at least want to know what you are doing. If you take another example, let's say that you are an accountant and your heart is in say scuba diving or something. Just go spend time at a scuba diving shop and volunteer your time and find out what it takes to own a scuba diving shop and go on more scuba diving trips. The idea is that you end up building a set of what might be called tacit knowledge,

not formal knowledge, but knowledge that's maybe implicit, difficult to kind of articulate in words but you end up discovering the community that's into that, you end up discovering what aspects of that job that you thought you would really like you actually end up hating. Maybe you don't like the idea of filling up tanks every evening and you thought that that somehow wasn't part of the job of owning a scuba diving shop. So, that's the idea that over time spending two, three, four or five years even sometimes in that area that you thought might be more fulfilling for you will end up revealing to you whether it actually is something that would be fulfilling or it was just one of your aspirational dreams. And what this lady Herminia Ibarra has discovered in her book "Working Identity" is that people who take that path of slowly branching out rather than taking this continuous jump from what you are doing to what you think might be a passion is a much, much more stable way to transition out of the job that you find meaningless to a job that you find more meaningful. What's happening in those three, four, five years is that even though it sounds like a long time you are actually... you are on a journey there, you are on a journey of being from your currently meaningless job towards a job that is going to be more meaningful, but it's not something that a journey that requires you to abandon all your present contacts and your family and put them in jeopardy by doing that. You are taking everybody along for the ride a little bit and you are communicating with them on what's going on and that's a much better path to take, slow and organic path I call it. And the third thing that you can do. Sorry, did you want to say something?

DJ: No, I just wanted to say that I am a big fan of Herminia Ibarra and she was in the podcast a while back as well so completely...

RR: Oh, wonderful, yeah. All right. So and the last one is really let's say that both of these paths are not available to you, I mean the job crafting you can't do it and you really can't afford to spend any more time pursuing what you think might be a second career volunteering for a scuba diving shop for example, then at least, the very least pick up a hobby that's intrinsically motivating for you. Maybe it is solving jigsaw puzzles, maybe it's learning about I don't know Greek history. Nowadays, we have access to so many different resources on the internet that I think it would be a shame if we didn't pursue our hobbies. And it turns out there's lots of work on this that even if you have a job in which you are not into it, it is not meaningful, but you have a set of hobbies that you are into and highly meaningful for you, deeply satisfying that's going to overflow into affecting your job satisfaction. So that's the very least that we can do, I would say.

DJ: Got it. Actually, one of the other guests on the podcast Stewart Friedman uses the term psychological spill over where he talks about how you feel about a certain domain and how that spills over into a different domain. So possibly there's a little bit of that happening, lovely. Moving to a different theme Raj. You talk there was an interesting anecdote, which I couldn't just not pay attention to which was about happier batsmen having better averages than other cricketers, so looks like we may not have the IPL this year in India but I guess you can't take cricket out of an Indian's mind. Talk to us about this piece of work, what's the insight?

RR: So, again, I really have to apologise, I know that I mentioned that statistic or that paper in my book, but it's been a long time since I read it and I think if I remember correctly that was a paper that got published in the early 90s, and you can look up the reference in my book. So, I don't remember the details of it but it is as you mentioned it is this finding that happier batsmen have better averages. And I don't know if you follow cricket to the extent where you have a little bit of an idea of the happiness of the some of the Indian batsmen or how happy they look. Certainly, Dhoni seems like a very calm guy, maybe not a happy guy, but very calm guy and some of the other people may not be as capable of regulating their emotions than other people. Kohli might on the face of it appear like he's not in control of his emotions but I think he is just a bit of an exception definitely but also very, very good at channelling his energy and in becoming focused. So, I don't think he is an

unhappy guy. Anyway, I mean if you contrast them with somebody like... again, I mean we are talking about people who are in the national team or have been and so they are obviously kind of like very, very, very good but even within that group somebody like an Ambati Rayudu if you take it, from my understanding of just reading on Cricinfo and stuff he doesn't seem like a guy who gets along very well with other people. So that might be a reason why he got dropped. Anyway, this is not really a scientific analysis, I have not said that and I don't remember that article in detail.

DJ: Got it, no problem. But maybe moving to another theme that you spoke about earlier in our conversation Raj, you speak about prioritizing but not pursuing happiness and it's a bit like falling asleep, right, the harder you try the harder it gets. How do we walk this tightrope and where's the line?

RR: Yeah, so some time back I talked a little bit about this idea of what does prioritizing mean and how is it different from chasing happiness or pursuing happiness. And the idea is that very similar to how if you prioritize sleep you would basically adopt a set of habits that make it more likely that you are going to get a good night sleep and they could be things like exercising. We know that we are more likely to get better sleep if we are physically tired. Likewise you can do some other things like not have a huge meal before going to sleep, that's going to maybe upset your stomach or not get into an argument with your wife on which TV channel to watch for example or your spouse, things like that, maybe taking a warm shower. Actually, there's a very, very good book on this topic, maybe you have read it, it's called "Why we Sleep" by Matthew Walker.

DJ: He was on the podcast as well actually, interestingly.

RR: Oh, wow. So, you have really gotten a lot of very influential people on your podcast, so I am very honoured now.

DJ: No, no, no... I think it is one-third of our life so I was curious about his insights so it was a very insightful conversation.

RR: Okay, so then you probably know that he talks about at least five things that you can do including going to sleep at the same time every day and night, setting your room temperature to be a little bit low, not consuming too much alcohol or coffee and so on. And so that's how you would prioritise getting sleep, good night sleep and what you wouldn't do is get really upset if you are not immediately able to fall asleep because you are chasing the sleep and as you are lying down watching out for when you are about to fall asleep and say, there, I almost fell asleep. So, if you do that it's actually going to be counterproductive and very similar way if you wanted to be happy just pursue those things that you know from past experience make you happier. Don't bite off more than you can chew, have a sense of time affluence in your life, don't chase superiority, find something meaningful to do, help other people out and so on and then I think that happiness you will just discover emerges as a reliable by-product. It's a question of probability of course, it's never a 100% guaranteed, but you can kind of bet really that you are going to be more happy if you put those things in place, that's what I mean by prioritising habits.

DJ: And picking up on the other thing you mentioned Raj which is about pursuing flow rather than chasing superiority, you specifically allude to athletes, right and you talk about the fact that their needs to be an intrinsic desire to win but the moment the match finishes and you end up on the other side you need to be detached to the outcome, right? I am curious about how athletes make that switch happen? How do we ensure we give our best up to a point and then suddenly completely flip in case the results don't play in our way? What's your observation there?

RR: Yeah, so that's... it's a big topic and I don't know how a lot of the athletes who are very good at it do it, hats off to them because obviously they are elite athletes and yet it's not, it's actually not even so much what happens after the game is over. Of course, the gracious athletes are willing to acknowledge that the other player was better and so on but even going from one point, one moment in the match to the next, you really goofed up in the previous point, say in tennis, are you going to be able to now forget what happened and really focus on what's going on in this point right now, that ability to compartmentalize at some level your mind and really get into a deep focus in this moment is a very, very important thing and lots of books have been written about it. This book that I like on this topic is the "Inner Game of Tennis", I don't know if you have come across this book, wonderful book.

DJ: No

RR: So when you talk about how do you set a goal that you are deeply, deeply passionate about and pursue it with a lot of passion, whim and vigour and enthusiasm, do everything you can to achieve that goal and yet in the moment when the goal is not achieved not wallow in self-pity and misery and you become resilient even at that point and optimistic for the future and maybe you kind of re-engage with that goal and re-pursue it or you change your goal slightly because you know for whatever reason that wasn't achievable or you learn from it and pursue an entirely different goal, how do you kind of go about that. It's a very fascinating topic, and I think that we as Indians are lucky in the sense that we have the Bhagavad Gita, I mean something that we all grew up with and I think that the core message of that at least as far as I understand it right, I am not a religion major or anything like that by any means but the core message is very much on point right on this topic that you pursue your duties or your goals, whatever your duties are, you try to fulfil them and yet you don't get emotionally affected if you don't achieve your goals. Or for that matter, even if you do achieve it, you don't take a sense of pride, it's not about your ego and you achieved it and you are better than other people. And so, I think therein lies the trick a little bit, that A, when you do succeed it's not a matter of ego and pride and what's called hubristic pride. You maybe are grateful for the fact that you were able to achieve that goal for all the people that helped you out in helping you achieve that goal. So, there's more of a sense of gratitude perhaps that and if you can do that then I think that will be a little bit easier for you to switch when you do fail from wallowing in self-pity to maybe being graceful. But the other thing that is very, very important that I found very useful that I talk about in the book I call it the dispassionate pursuit of passion and maybe I can spend a few minutes talking about it but the idea is that when you do fail it's an outcome that our mind has categorized as a bad thing, as an undesirable thing, but if you were to look back on your life's experiences, I think that you will agree, and most people I have asked to engage with me on this exercise I call it the reminisce and reflect exercise, basically the exercise involves recalling an event that was negative and then asking yourself, how do I feel about it now? And what I find is that if that event that people recall and I have some people recall the event that happened in the distant past, two years or before that or I have some other people recall an event from the recent past two months or within two months and so what I found is that reliably I find this that so long as sufficient water has flown under the bridge that it's two years or more that's in the distant past the negative events are no longer considered as negative. And sometimes they are actually considered a positive thing now. So I have had people say to me things like oh, when I broke up with my girlfriend right after college, that was maybe 13 years back it was like devastating for me, end of the world, but now I am so happy that I did not get married to that person because later I discovered she was completely cuckoo, things like that or I broke a bone when I was in my 12th grade and it ruined my holidays after the 12th, I really wanted to enjoy, I wanted to travel, I wanted to play cricket and here I was stuck in a hospital bed, but you know what because of that now that I think about it, I ended up learning C++ programming because I was lying down in bed and had nothing to do and that's when I

ended up discovering that I was truly deeply passionate about software programming. The point is that when we encounter outcomes, we look at it with a very narrow frame of mind and very even narrow-minded frame of mind and we think of that as a negative outcome and we are convinced that it is negative and the fact that we are convinced that it's negative actually makes it more negative or makes it negative when in reality it may not have been negative at all. It may be exactly the thing that you need in order for you to grow and learn and to take advantage of new doors of opportunity that would not have opened up had that negative thing not happened. I'll give you an example from my own life; it is a very trivial one. So, a few months back I was on my way to New York City and I was going to give a talk and it ended up being... I ended up missing the flight because there was a lot of traffic and build up and partly my mistake but I had budgeted about 45 minutes to get to the airport, it usually takes about that time but it ended up taking an hour and a half and I ended up missing the flight and it felt really bad at that point. But I've been talking about this concept of dispassionate pursuit of passion and who knows whether an outcome is good or bad, you might as well think that every outcome is good and that puts you in the best place. In short that's what that is, the concept and so I ended up thinking about it that way and what ended up happening is that on the next flight, eventually the flight that I got, I was actually sitting next to a guy from an organization and we ended up chatting about happiness in the workplace and they invited me over to their organization to give a talk and I am now engaged with their organization for three years in a row. So, this happened about three years back. I might have said three months back sometime back but happened a while back. I ended up doing a series of workshops and consulting gigs with this organization, which has been deeply satisfying for me. So that's the idea that when you do fail, when bad outcomes happen, you might think that that's the end of the world at that point in time and maybe it's difficult to pick yourself up immediately after it. But if you kind of remind yourself that look, I mean, let me think back on my past negative outcomes, how do I feel about them, and if I don't feel as negative and I think that they in fact helped me learn and grow then why can't this particular negative outcome also turn out the same way later on. And if that is true then at least you can start feeling the glimpses of positivity, you can kind of see the light at the end of the tunnel so to speak rather than being devastated, so that's the idea.

DJ: Maybe just going back to one of those things and we might have discussed this already, but maybe just to sharpen the understanding Raj, you speak about pursuing flow rather than chasing superiority as one of the ways of enhancing our happiness levels and maybe just to make it real, one hears about tennis players and painters and so on pursuing flow, but let's say people in the corporate world, business leaders who are in transition, how do they... what's your suggestion around how they could discover what gives them flow?

RR: Yeah. So this is again a very big topic and one of the ways in which I feel that our education systems fail us around the world may be especially in places like India, although there is lots of positive things that can be said about the education system in India too, is that they don't really help us understand where our passions lie, rather we go after things that are going to pay the bills and will make us a lot of money and so on. So, we sacrifice our intrinsic interests for the sake of extrinsic rewards and you brought this up earlier too that chasing superiority seems like a good thing to do until you reach a certain point. So, I think that one of the very important things for people to experience more flow in their lives is to start at the beginning, which is to understand what is it that is intrinsically motivating for me? You might be familiar with the work of Sir Ken Robinson? He has written a book called The Element and he was on your podcast too; I am not sure?

DJ: Not yet, not yet.

RR: So, he talks about this intersection between what you are good at and what you enjoy doing and he calls it the element and I think it's very, very important to identify that because once you identify

it then there's a higher chance that you are actually going to put in what... and as Erickson says is the critical amount of time that you need in order to get to a level of mastery in a field, which is ballpark around 10,000 hours. Of course, he says, use that ballpark very loosely but a lot of times basically. You are not going to put in those 10,000 hours if you pursue extrinsic rewards because it's not deeply intrinsically motivating for you. And even if you do end up putting those 10,000 hours if you are pursuing extrinsic rewards, it's going to come at a cost to some other things that are important in your life, your relationships, your health etc. And in this context, I should refer to the work of Robert Vallerand on pursuing passion with a sense of harmony versus obsession. So that's the idea that if you want to have more flow in your life not as an athlete but working let's say as a professor or as an investment banker it doesn't matter what field it is. You can have flow in any field, then it's very, very important to pursue your passion and that's... the reason is that you are more likely to experience the kind of flow that's really immersive, what might be called high flow when you have a high level of ability. At low level ability you get to experience low flow or medium flow, that's not very engrossing, it's not going to answer one of life's big questions, which is what is my purpose in life. It's when you experience high flow on a consistent basis, maybe not every day basis, but certainly every week basis that's when you feel that yeah, I know what I was put on Earth for. That's a very satisfying place to be and for that to happen you need to experience high flow on a relatively regular basis and that in turn means that you need to have put in a critical amount of time, around 10,000 hours pursuing that field and that in turn means that you need to be intrinsically motivated otherwise you can't stomach putting so many hours into that field. And so it can like... in a chain of events it goes back to starting with discovering where your element is, what am I good at, what do I enjoy doing and then you have a high level of I think high chance I should say of ending up in a place of high level of mastery so that you can experience high flow. Did that make sense?

DJ: Couple of questions as we wrap up Raj. One is maybe changing the topic to children? I am a parent of two young kids 10 and 6. What's been your research around raising happy kids, what are some of the things we should think about as parents and where do you think people... what are common places where you see people trip in the way they think about raising children? Any insights there?

RR: Yeah, sure. So, I actually just recently got a paper accepted that's coming out soon on the impact of parental love that children get experienced when they are young and the impact that that has on their future financial success and we were very lucky to get hold of this data set from Canada which followed the same set of respondents for about 25 years. And these respondents are about 35-40 years old now, and we got them from right around when they were about five-years-old to about 15-years-old and they responded to four waves of surveys. And it collected lots of things including the level of love that these children got as kids and the dependent variable is their financial success now, which we define as not just how much money they have and how much money they perceive that they have, so subjective kind of success as well as more objective income level success and also stress, how much debt they have and how much credit card loans they have and so on. And what we find is that there is a really significant positive effect of parental love, parental nurturance that these children get as kids and these respondents got as kids and where they are now financially in their life. So, in answering this question, I think it's useful to think about two dimensions. One is the amount of love that children get which can be taken as whether the parents really truly deeply care for the children's well-being and are willing to go out of their way to help them out. For example, wake up at four in the morning if the children have to study and make them Horlicks or Bournvita or whatever, and make sure that they are getting good quality sleep at night, make good food for them, all kinds of normal things that you would think of in a loving house. So you can you can envision this graph in your head, one dimension the vertical dimension being amount of love that the kids get, Low to High and the other dimension is the amount of discipline that they get, that are there rules in

the house and do they have to follow the rules and if they are not followed then they are disciplined maybe through punishment and may be through other means. And so again, you can imagine Low versus High. And these four cells that come out have actually been named and the researcher that does a lot of work on this is or used to do a lot of work, maybe she is not doing any more is a person named Baum Rind and so the High-High cell, high levels of love, high levels of discipline that is called authoritative parenting. High levels of discipline, Low levels of love and that's called authoritarian parenting and you can think of one trap, is it Colonel von Trapp whatever from The Sound of Music...

DJ: The Sound of Music

RR: Yeah, so he was authoritarian, I mean lot of discipline and very little love until Maria comes into the household. And the low levels of love, low levels of discipline that's called negligent parenting where the kid is just abandoned basically, no love no discipline. If you have read this short story called Junius Maltby I think that was probably negligent. Actually, maybe that was permissive actually, that's the fourth category, which is lot of love and no discipline and what we found is that as far as we could tell the discipline dimension wasn't that significant at all in our study. So one of the things that we worry about is that if we don't discipline our kids when they are growing up then they are going to end up being messed up, they are not going to be able to be diligent in pursuing their passions, they are not going to put in those 10,000 hours and they are not going to be successful, they are going to fritter it all away and that's a big deep worry that a lot of parents have. And I am not saying that discipline is not important, but I think it's a little bit less important than we think it is. And if it comes to a compromise or a trade-off between love and discipline, I think that love should always trump, love should always trump. And sometimes what we do and we are very good at this as human beings is that in the garb of love we end up passing what is actually our pet desire and so for a very stark example of this that we want our kids to really succeed in let's say playing the piano, and we give them like very harsh meet or harsh punishment if they end up not practicing enough, and we tell them that it's all for you. It's for you because I love you that I do this. So, in the garb of love we kind of end up being strict martinets that are even willing to psychologically punish our kids so that they achieve our goals. So, I would say that as a parent I think one thing you need to do is you need to step back a little bit and ask yourself why do I want them to achieve this goal and really be deep like truly honest to yourself about why. And I think that many parents will discover that one of the reasons why they want their kids to achieve these goals is because they themselves did not achieve these goals. So, it's kind of a vicarious way of fulfilling what happens to be your pet dream and you want to... now that you have failed in achieving it and often it's the case that these parents themselves were probably subject to a lot of discipline without love from their parents. And at that point they reacted violently against it or passive aggressively against it and they didn't learn to play the piano as a kid or Mridangam or what have you and now they are kind of regretting it and they wished that they get they had actually learnt. And they absorb that blame to some extent and now they are kind of ragging right? I mean you just pass it on to the next generation. There is a much, much better approach and the approach has got to do with love. So, if you truly want your kids to achieve this thing, you want them to achieve great heights in piano then why don't you learn it yourself right now. Sit down with them and practice it rather than telling them you know what, you go and practice, next two hours you are going to practice, I shouldn't hear a peep from you, I should only hear you play the piano and meanwhile you are sitting there watching a sitcom or one of the shows, soap operas on TV. What's that message you are giving out to your kid. The message is that what they care about is my achievements and I am only loved to the extent that I achieve things. That's not a good message to send to your kid, it's going to mess them up. So you learn it yourself, you make it creative, maybe tell them that look, okay, let's figure out the song, the piano for the song and we're going to sit down and I'll learn how to play the guitar or I'll sing and I want you to learn the piano and play the piano parts. And sit down with them, help them out, make

it a game, gamify it, have a lot of laughter, lot of creativity, lot of love and that's a much better approach, much better parenting approach. So, it's a very big area I mean how to raise happy kids. One of the other things that I would say very quickly is transmit messages to them that nurture a sense of abundance in them rather than a scarcity mindset. So, if they come back from a game of cricket, rather than ask them did you win, how much runs did you score, how many wickets did you take, let the first question be did you have a good time? Did you enjoy yourself? Did you help other people out? If you are playing a game in which that is relevant like Assists in basketball. So those are much better questions. In fact Adam Grant, we talked about him quite a bit earlier, one of the practices that he has on a daily basis, I think maybe weekly but certainly weekly if not daily basis is to ask his children who did you help out, who are the three people you helped out today because he knows that helping other people out is a much more reliable determinant of success than striving for superiority over other people. And so, in a similar vein we know that abundance minded people are not just happier, they are more successful as well. So, encourage this sense of abundance. Ask them if they are pursuing their passion, if they're having fun, if they are enjoying themselves, if they're helping other people out rather than encouraging social comparisons, don't ask the child okay, how come you are not reading big books like Amy does? She has already finished the Harry Potter series and here you are still reading Tin Tin or something. So those kinds of things, in the short run it might make the kid insecure and make them pursue goals but in the long run you are really messing them up. That's not a very good strategy at all.

DJ: Got it. Lovely Raj, I don't want to end with a very open and a big question but maybe since it's relevant for the times we are in. Given coronavirus we started with it right and a lot of us are homebound, especially in India we are in a lockdown and we are not sure about the future. Any headline thoughts on how we can cope with the current situation happily given everything that is unfolding around us.

RR: Yeah, so, I mean this is a great question and believe it or not the Deans at my school they want me to talk about this. So, I am putting my thoughts together on this and I think that one of the things I am going to do is I am going to send out an email to my Coursera students to ask them what are the set of challenges that they are facing with this virus thing. And I just want to know the lay of the land a little bit better before I offer any tips or suggestions for people. So, I think that it is going to come down to like two or three groups. There is certainly one group that is suffering a lot because they are facing personal loss, maybe they themselves are sick and that is one group and then there's a second group for whom it's highly anxiety-provoking because the future is uncertain now, okay, maybe the job security issues for them, if not for them directly for somebody that is part of their family. So that is another group and then there's of course the third group for whom this is going to be as far as we can tell kind of a bit of a temporary hiccup. Even though it's long lasting assuming that all of this passes over and one year from now, certainly two years from now we just think of this as an event that happened without having any long-term consequences really on the say economy and things like that, that group right for whom this is at some level, if you put things in perspective, it's a kind of a bit of source of frustration and irritation perhaps but nothing much bigger or deeper than that. So, I can see that there are at least these three groups and each of these three groups has differing levels of I would say stress, anxiety provoking things elements in this and each of these three groups needs an entirely different set of suggestions I think on how to deal with it. And I don't even want to begin to claim that I understand how people who have actually lost somebody or are in a situation where there's a big prospect of that happening, they are personally also suffering health-wise, what they must be going through, it must be hellish, and I don't know what I can offer there. For the second group that is facing this job loss prospects and huge amounts of uncertainty and stress maybe even cash flow issues things like that, again, I am not in that situation myself, but I've certainly dealt with that kind of situation in my life and there are other situations not the pandemic

but other situations in which that's relatively commonplace that kind of thing happens and I can certainly talk about some things that one can do there. And for the third group I can offer a lot of suggestions and advice. And for the second group just very quickly, I just mentioned that it comes down to understanding and dealing with uncertainty, that's the crux of it. I think that uncertainty is aversive for us, as human beings we would like to have control, we like to be able to predict things and any situation that causes a huge amount of uncertainty is hugely stressful for us. And in this case if it's going to actually have an impact on our lifestyle even access to basic needs, some of the families are actually suffering from that right? It just cut off their source of income like daily wage earners, for example, even in the U.S. plumbers for example, things like that. It's going to be hugely stressful, but so long as you have enough to tide this over and assuming that this is not going to be too long lasting I think that if you have a better attitude towards uncertainty you are going to come out better in the end, not just come out better in the end but also not feel as negative in the process. And dealing with uncertainty it goes back a little bit with that dispassionate pursuit of passion, are there doors of opportunities that are opening up because of this negativity that would not have opened up had this thing not happen. And if you look at it from that perspective, I think that you will actually, I am pretty sure that almost anyone can discover something in this situation that's a bit of a silver lining. And so, the idea is to focus on that, expand that, and make it bigger. If you are a plumber for example and you don't have this daily opportunity to earn a daily wage, maybe learn up about how to create an online website; maybe come up with an idea where you can walk people through to fix their plumbing on the phone. Just try and be creative to the extent that you can as best as you can. So, things like that so that's what I would offer. And for the third group where really I mean they can see that nothing big is going to happen, their jobs are secure and it's just that they're having to deal with family members 24/7 all the time in cramped up spaces and things are starting to kind of boil over a little bit. I think it's a great learning opportunity to practice some of the things that we know are very, very important for long-term happiness, including leading a healthy lifestyle. Maybe you can all as a family practice a few healthy things, make healthy food, try new recipes every day. I myself, I work out at the gym every day if I can but now that's not possible and so I do a 20-minute kind of intense workout routine. I follow this lady called Pamela Reif, I think that's how you pronounce her name and she is awesome. It is pretty intense; I do the intense workout for 20 minutes in the evening and in the morning, I follow somebody else called SarahBethYoga. Sarah Beth is her name and she's got nice 20-30-minute routines, nice kind of easy-paced yoga in the mornings. I do that and as a family what we have done is now that we spend so much time together we have created this big board and on the board we basically have rows being days of the week and the columns being different times of the day like morning, afternoon and evening and everybody gets to dictate or plan for the rest of us, everybody in the family an activity. So, for example, we have an international student staying with us for the whole year. Her name is Ligna, she's from Germany. So she decided that yesterday evening we were going to spend between 5 PM and 7 PM taking photographs, you know, this is Spring in Austin and we have lovely wildflowers and there's a field right opposite our home where all these bluebonnets come up and it looks really, really picturesque and she said let's go out there and wear blue so that it matches with the bluebonnets and we are just going to take photographs. And so, for two hours we just took a bunch of photographs which came out really well. It's really interesting when you allow people to say okay you get to choose, you decide whatever it is, everybody has to not just participate in the activity but actually be enthusiastic not be a wet blanket, even if you don't like the activity just pretend like you like it, just be a force of positivity rather than negativity and just amazing what kinds of things that people have come up with. My daughter, she let us through a dance routine, she's only 12-years-old, but she's been dancing for I don't know, I mean eight years so she's very good at Ballet and things like that. So she just taught us all these things and when you look at this dance, it just looks so simple and you think I can do that, but once you start to actually do it you realize man, I mean, this is tough, this takes a lot of balance and coordination. My son he held a

table tennis competition, I've made them watch this Free Solo I talked about it some time back. My wife, she came up with this idea of all us are going to create a cartoon strip. I thought there's no way that we're going to be able to do it in two hours but now with technology, there's this I forget the name of the website, but you just go there and then once you have a story line, you can actually pick characters and literally cut and paste them into these panels and you end up...

DJ: Very interesting

RR: Yeah, it's just awesome. So just be inventive, just what is the saying, when life gives you lemons make lemonade? So yeah, I think in the end it boils down to feeling good from the inside out. If you feel good from the inside out you are more resilient, you are more creative, you come up with ideas and you make good things happen even in bad situations. And I think that that's the overarching kind of piece of advice or suggestion that I have for the third group. I hope that that's useful Deepak.

DJ: No, no absolutely Raj and I am sure we could go on at least for another hour, but I am mindful of your time. So, thank you so much for being so generous with your time and insights on the podcast.

RR: Absolutely Deepak, it was a pleasure. You are really, really good at what you do obviously and you know this and all the best to you man. Thank you so much. Appreciate it.

DJ: Thank you so much Raj. Alright. Take care. Bye bye.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the conversation purposeful. If you are seeking value from the podcast, I would urge you to pause and pay it forward to Antarang Foundation, a not for profit based in Mumbai that works with children from challenging backgrounds and helps them acquire key life skills and enables them to find jobs. These are challenging times we are going through and your help will mean a lot.

You can either contribute to Antarang Foundation or hire through them. Here is Prashant Gupta (PG), a start-up founder and a former McKinsey partner and a Corporate Leader speaking about his experience hiring from Antarang.

PG: *"Hi I am Prashant and I run a business call Bandhu. Bandhu helps construction companies hire construction workers we are working with alumni of Antarang Foundation 2 girls and 1 boy and it has worked out well so far we were looking for people who could do out bunk tele calling to Hindi speaking construction workers all around the country explain Bandhu's preposition to them and if they are eager and open then get them to register on Bandhu. It is a semi scripted 3 to 5-minute conversation all the three of this kids from Antarang have done a good job of getting trained on this and then doing the daily calls without any active supervision from us they work from home and they use a smart phones they are registering a decent number of workers per day through calling they seem to have good energy and good work ethic and looks like we might work with Antarang for similar requirement as we go forward. I wish them very best in their..."*

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End of transcription

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

Parenting: Discussions around the role that parenting plays in shaping who we are and our beliefs, habits, behaviors and mindsets. Leaders share their personal experiences around how a lot of who they are got baked in their early years. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Coping with Covid-19: Leaders share their perspectives around how we can navigate through the Covid-19 situation that we are all going through. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Raj Raghunathan - Nuggets

- 56.00 Raj Raghunathan - The Full Conversation
- 56.01 Raj Raghunathan - The journey till date
- 56.02 Raj Raghunathan - Defining happiness
- 56.03 Raj Raghunathan - Achievement and happiness
- 56.04 Raj Raghunathan - Abundance mindset and happiness
- 56.05 Raj Raghunathan - Time scarcity and generosity burnout
- 56.06 Raj Raghunathan - Why we lose the plot with happiness
- 56.07 Raj Raghunathan - Navigating mid-life
- 56.08 Raj Raghunathan - Dealing with negative outcomes
- 56.09 Raj Raghunathan - Pursuing flow than chasing superiority
- 56.10 Raj Raghunathan - Raising happy kids - love versus discipline
- 56.11 Raj Raghunathan - Coping with COVID-19

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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