



## Guest

Over the last year and a quarter, since March 2020, a lot of us have been thrown into this work from anywhere world without any prior preparation. It is like being thrown into the deep end of a swimming pool without any prior training. We have had to figure out our own response to the evolving situation. While there has been no shortage of wisdom and webinars, I have been looking for a research backed view to learn from. In that context, I am excited to bring the next conversation with Darleen DeRosa (Consultant at SpencerStuart's Stamford office) and author of *Leading at a Distance: Practical Lessons for Virtual Success*, that she has co-authored with her colleague Jim Citrin, who leads SpencerStuart's North American CEO practice and is a core member of the firm's Board practice. SpencerStuart is one of the world's leading Leadership Advisory Services firms. Darleen has been studying Remote Work since 2008 long before COVID struck.

Given a lot of the listeners to this podcast are leaders in India or of Indian origin, we have also weaved in insights from some of the leaders in SpencerStuart in India (Ritu Kochhar, Sahiba Singh, Atul Bhandari and Rohit Kale) to contextualize the insights.

We speak about nuances in building relationships in 2D, driving accountability in a virtual world, what the office of the future looks like, effective remote leadership hiring, facilitating effective transitions, managing your energy in a relentless, all consuming online world and much more.

## Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 77<sup>th</sup> conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman. This podcast is a labour of love for the long term where I have conversations with leading practitioners, thinkers, authors, artists, sportsmen and other leading professionals to decode insights around leadership, transitions and careers.

When I am not podcasting, I am working with leaders as a Trusted Sounding Board helping leaders and organizations play to their unique potential. To know more about what is in the podcast archives and the advisory work I do, you could just visit [www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com).

We have an exciting update at the podcast. Several listeners have told us that we should be sharing some of the nuggets from the archives given we have 750 odd nuggets in the library and we continue to build on it. We have started doing that through WhatsApp where we share a couple of nuggets a week. If you wish to receive these, do note the number **+91 85914 52129**, add that number to your contacts and send us a WhatsApp message stating Interested. We will add you to the list. I repeat the number is **+91 85914 52129**.

In this podcast conversation, we speak to Darleen DeRosa, a Consultant with SpencerStuart's Stamford office in the US and the Co-Author of *Leading at a Distance*, that she has co-authored with her colleague Jim Citrin. Given Covid, all of us have had to deal with several leadership issues over

the last year plus. How do you recruit well, how do you onboard effectively, how do you set culture, drive apprenticeship, communicate intent and much much more. Darleen has been studying this topic of remote work for more than a decade. Covid has brought a lot of her thinking and research into the forefront! In this episode, we also do something that is different. I speak to four of the consultants from SpencerStuart's India office to get them to share a little bit of an India perspective on these matters. So, along with Darleen, you will hear from 4 of the colleagues from SpencerStuart India.

We have Rohit Kale (Rohit), Managing Partner for SpencerStuart in India.

Ritu Kochhar (Ritu) – Head of the Financial Services and Boards practice in India and Head of Private Equity practice in APAC,

Atul Bhandari (Atul)- Atul Bhandari is a Partner based in Spencer Stuart's New Delhi office and leads the Technology, Media, Telecommunications & Services (TMT&S) Practice across Asia Pacific. Atul also serves on Spencer Stuart's global Board of Directors.

Sahiba Singh (Sahiba) heads the Leadership Advisory practice for SS in India, focusing on the areas of leadership assessment & development, leadership team effectiveness and organisation culture advisory.

Without further ado, let us dive into the conversation with Darleen DeRosa and her colleagues at SpencerStuart India.

## Transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Darleen, thank you so much for taking the time to appear on the Play to Potential podcast, excited to be talking to you.

Darleen DeRosa (Darleen): Likewise, Deepak, thank you so much.

DJ: In the podcast Darlene, we are curious about people's journeys and their arc of life, if you will. If we could start with your journey before we dive into the book that you have just published, you have a PhD in Psychology from Temple University, then you spent eight years in large organizations. Then you set up your own consulting practice and you were there for about 12 years and now you are back in a large organization at Spencer Stuart. So, talk to us a little bit about how you have thought about, you know, being on your own, building your own enterprise versus leveraging the power of a large platform.

Darleen: Yeah, absolutely. And this is a topic that I am actually really interested in and when we talk to leaders and we coach leaders, it's interesting to hear their journey. But for me, personally, I had been in the larger companies for a while after graduate school and working with leaders and I have loved what I did. And I always felt like there was a part of me that wanted to build something that was my own, that was entrepreneurial and actually coincidentally a lot of it came out of the research that I was doing at the time on virtual teams. So, it really is aligned with the conversation that we are going to have today, but I wanted to build a practice helping organizations and their leaders be more effective at leading at a distance. And so, that actually became a core solution in my consulting

practice that we built and we did this for 13 years. And, of course, we did a number of other things but it was a really fun time to do something entrepreneurial and it was great.

DJ: And if I may come in here, what prompted you to start studying this even 10-15 years back?

Darleen: Yeah, great question. So, I had always been really interested in two things: people and business, and especially how people collaborate and engage with one another. And so, at one point I thought I was going to get my PhD in Clinical Psychology, but then I thought I really am interested in teams and the team dynamic. And so, I actually purposely chose a graduate school with an advisor who was focused on building high performing teams and as I was looking at the data and again, keep in mind, this is like a long time ago, this is more than a decade ago, there wasn't a lot out there in business about how does technology facilitate team dynamics. And while AT&T and big companies had been working virtually way back then, I mean, again, this was a long time ago, it was interesting there wasn't a lot of data on that. And so, I actually developed my Masters and my PhD dissertation studying real virtual teams in large, huge companies. And so, I had always been interested in that even from the early days of grad school, and that really became a theme in my career even though I didn't realize it at the time.

DJ: Got it, got it. And how have you thought about back to the earlier question, Darlene, large platform versus solo, have you... talk to us a little bit about how you have thought about that choice and how you have sort of leaned in one way or the other.

Darleen: Yeah, absolutely. And I think like with anything in life there's trade-offs, right? And so that's been something that's quite clear but my journey at Spencer Stuart even though it has only been about 18 months has been truly phenomenal, and really the power of a platform, especially the one that we have at Spencer Stuart, I am spending my time advising CEOs and Boards and as are my colleagues and the platform that we have here has really enabled Jim and I as we wrote this book, but in general to really engage with key business leaders CEOs, CHROs. We interviewed about over a hundred CEOs and CHROs for the book alone. It provides you access to these business leaders that I certainly would not have had if I had been out on my own. And the other real benefit of the platform is just great people to engage with. And so, this book effort was a huge team of people, a huge virtual team who work together and clearly that's very different than when I had my own company and wrote the first book in 2011. So, in summary, I think there's a bunch of trade-offs and for me it's really about your own personal journey and what you need at that moment and where you really get your purpose from.

DJ: Hmm, and let's dive into the book *Leading at a Distance*, Darlene, you know, you spoke about a hundred odd CEOs and CXOs. Could you provide a little more color around the kind of research and the backing behind the book before we start discussing the insights from the book?

Darleen: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. So, as I mentioned we did about a hundred interviews with CEOs and CHROs and this really Deepak was to get stories, to get best practices and anecdotes, and we knew that this, by the way, we were doing this research during covid. So, we are doing this research during a global pandemic, but we thought we still could garner some amazing insights. And remember this is when organizations, especially those organizations who weren't working virtually before had to rapidly pivot and make this very significant change. And then in addition to the hundred or plus interviews that we did, we did three surveys over the course of about nine months. And so, one survey was targeted towards CEOs, because we were really interested in the CEO dynamic during this transition and then we had two other surveys that were looking more about how are people coping, what are some of the challenges people are experiencing, how has productivity been impacted? So, looking at general trends as people and organizations had to rapidly

pivot to this virtual environment. And so, what was interesting is that we did the research at three different points to really look and see if there were any significant differences. And also, we had our earlier research to compare this to. So, it was a true team effort that was really great because I think what was helpful for Jim and I as we were writing, the book is to use this data and not be as focused on the research and the statistics but have a hands-on toolkit for leaders so that they have practical tools and strategies to navigate the virtual landscape.

DJ: Hmm, more a practitioner's toolkit rather than an academician's, I guess, thesis?

Darleen: Absolutely, yeah.

DJ: Got it. And you have been researching this for a decade plus as you said. What changed and what stayed the same when we think about leading from a distance, leading at a distance rather?

Darleen: Yeah, it was interesting, in 2011, we did a lot of research, we looked at best-in-class virtual teams and what differentiated the best virtual leader. So, we were really focused on what does good look like and that was the focus of that first book. And so, probably not surprisingly in general regardless of this virtual dynamic leadership is more complex than ever in a VUCA environment and frankly that makes virtual leadership even more challenging. So back in 2011, we knew that virtual leadership was harder so that for leaders who struggle with coaching and team dynamics, they are really going to struggle in a virtual environment and frankly that hasn't changed. Technology has gotten better, trends have accelerated, but in general virtual leadership is much more challenging. One thing that interestingly did not change was our RAMP model of virtual leader effectiveness. So, in 2011, when we studied the profile of top-performing virtual leaders, they did four things really well. They built relationships and trust, they fostered accountability, they motivated people and influenced people, and they used process and technology to support the team. But if you really looked at the top one-third of the virtual leaders who were really rated like the most highly effective leaders, they were really balanced; so, they didn't over-index on relationships, they didn't over-index on process. They were very attuned to the unique dynamics of a virtual setting. So, you fast-forward to the latest research, and we did other surveys of course in the most recent book and the RAMP model literally comes out with the same dimensions of a virtual leader effectiveness. So, I thought that was fascinating.

DJ: Yeah, the more things change, more things stay the same, right, at some level fascinating. And let's talk about some of these in maybe double, let's double-click on some of these, building relationships, right? In the book, you talk about starting a relationship in 3D and moving it to 2D as something that's easy. But starting something in two dimensions and staying 2D for a prolonged period of time is a challenge. Talk to us a little bit about what effective leaders do in building and sustaining relationships in a two-dimensional plane, what nuances exist?

Darleen: Absolutely. I mean, and keep in mind, we are just coming out of a global pandemic and we are still not even fully out of it, right? So, there's some nuance of how much of this is because people have literally been at home not interacting with anyone outside of work. Now, you have got people who are literally working from home with their kids, their pets, their elders, you know, it's a really complex environment. So, keep in mind that some of this might be unique to the pandemic but in general being virtual too long just like we saw in the pandemic, the number one thing that people missed was the social interaction and they felt more isolated. And I think this point in time has caused people to realize that humans value connection with others. And as a result, leaders spend even more time building trust, getting to know people and investing in relationships. And really, it's not that you can't do that in a virtual setting but leaders who are more effective are really purposeful and deliberate. One leader that I am coaching actually blocks time in his calendar to do

this. I mean, that's how playful you have to be otherwise you get busy and distracted and you are not as focused on engaging with the team but perhaps more importantly making sure that your team members are engaging with one another. And so, I have seen really great examples of leaders step up and check in with people just with no agenda, which at first might seem a little strange if you haven't had that type of relationship with your manager, but just simply calling someone to say, hey, I was just thinking about you, would love to know how you are doing and is there anything I can do to support you. That's a great example of one CHRO that we interviewed who makes what he calls care calls just to check in on people. Dedicating time in your day, putting it in your calendar to check in with your key customers or stakeholders, having a virtual coffee chat or a lunch. So, again, it's simple things but these things might occur more naturally if you happen to run into someone in a hallway in the office but in a virtual setting people get so busy that they are not as purposeful about building time for the relationship elements.

DJ: Sahiba Singh (Sahiba), who heads the Leadership Advisory practice for SpencerStuart in India, has an interesting example of a CEO she is working with who creates a safe space for his team members to attend to any important issue outside the realm of work.

Sahiba: *"So communication increasingly is actually about not only what you are saying but what you are not saying what is happening in the background. So when you are talking to leaders, and their children walk into the room, or their pets walk in, and they are okay with it, they are also sending a message that it is okay for the others that there is a life beyond work that is playing out behind our Zoom backgrounds, so that is one aspect. I think the other is, I remember a story when the second wave that hit and most of us had family and friends who were impacted and it was really difficult time, there was a CEO who I was working with who would start every meeting by saying to whoever was on that call that if anybody needs to drop off this call to take care of their families or if they are feeling just very, sort of, emotionally or mentally burdened with what is going on, they are free to drop off the call, we will cover for them, no questions asked, and I thought that was really powerful because you were communicating your intent very well through that as well."*

DJ: She goes on to talk about another leader who shows empathy towards people in the ecosystem not just caring for people within the company.

Sahiba: *"I think the other thing that I found was that during the time, again during the second wave, I was working with a few clients who were in the logistics space or healthcare space and we would get onto calls obviously to discuss business topics and they would start these discussion by offering any help that I or our families or our teams needed, you know, in order to get vaccinated, to get access to hospitals, healthcare, whatever that might be, in whichever way their businesses could help. And I think it was really powerful because you think of these as moments that matter, and they stay with you in terms of the special things that people have done and that really makes an impression as well."*

DJ: Now lets get back to the Darleen DeRosa

DJ: One of the themes I have been hearing with the leaders I have been working with is they saying that the current environment is quite efficient but not sure if it's effective and you need to be really deliberate to make it effective and not just efficient. So, how have you seen this whole efficiency versus effectiveness play out in a remote working context?

Darleen: Yeah, it's a great question. And interestingly, I mean, this is not, I am not speaking for every business and every industry. Certainly, some industries were hit particularly hard during this crisis, but in general, if you look at our research and just the plethora of research that's out there, Deepak,

it's clear, people feel like productivity and efficiency is up even despite the economy last year, but it's interesting there's so much more burnout. So, sometimes I believe the productivity is just because people are working longer hours and are working differently and it's masking what we sometimes say is extreme burnout and fatigue and that's something we experience at Spencer Stuart. We are really busy and I think that's just a byproduct of people trying to adjust during a crisis where you are stuck at home and now you perhaps are worried about your job so you are working even more. We can't go anywhere so we are working nights. If our kids are home, we have more things to deal with during the day so we are working different hours to offset that. So, I think, in general not all CEOs, but many CEOs have seen an increase in productivity and efficiency but it's a complex situation. It's not one-size-fits-all and certainly that this is not true for every organization.

DJ: Hmm. And going back to the competencies of a good virtual leader, the other piece you spoke about was how you drive accountability. What have you learnt about what it takes to drive accountability in a remote context? And the reason I ask is it is a fine line between giving people the space to perform given their context, at the same time having a tab over what they are up to and whether, you know, you as an organization or they are on track on the deliverables. So, how have you seen effective leaders walk that tightrope?

Darleen: Yeah, and for leaders who are used to walking around and checking in on people or having really clear metrics or being in the office to make sure that people are working, this has been a significant mindset shift for some leaders. Now, for other leaders, this has been totally normative and they don't feel like they need that hands-on management. So, one thing we are often coaching people and talking to leaders about is you have got, again, it's about being deliberate, you have got to be more clear about expectations because in a virtual environment it's harder to set clear expectations, and perhaps more importantly, priority shift. So, how do you as a leader continually check in with people to make sure that they have clear direction? But one thing that we often talk to leaders about is called the ATC model and it's really simple by the way. So, people intuitively understand this, but what we see time and time again is they don't follow it, and I think why it resonates Deepak is because we say that it's an acronym for air traffic controller. So, just like an air traffic controller managing a lot of flights, you as a leader have to help people manage their priorities, their workloads and you can't really see them so you don't need to know what they are doing or when they are doing it, you just need to look at the output; that's much more important in a virtual setting than when people work. So, the ATC model is simple, it's action, timetable, checkpoints and the checkpoints is it gets to your direct question about if you are very clear with people about when you can check-in to support them or what they would like you to do in terms of the check-ins, then you are not going to be perceived as a micromanager. But if I am randomly emailing you or pinging you on Teams to check-in people might feel like that's pressure. But if I said to you Deepak, all right, so you have got this project, when do you think it would make sense for us to have a touch point and you said to me, two weeks and I said great and then we have a touch point. It's not going to feel like hey I am checking in with you all the time. So, again, it's really simple, it's not like this is some profound model but we see leaders micromanage all the time and they are emailing people, they are sending texts, and they are really not following that balance between delegating and empowering and micromanaging. And then, lastly, I would say that you have got to adapt your style, one-size-fits-all is not going to be an approach here. If you have got a highly tenured employee who's really capable, you probably don't need to check-in as often and that's why it's important to have a coaching conversation with the individual to say, how can I support you? So that style, flexibility and situational leadership matters more than ever.

DJ: Got it. No, it's interesting, I was, one of the leaders I was interacting with, a pretty senior leader in Uber, he had an interesting signature. It said, I have sent this email because it's convenient for me to send it out over a weekend or late at night but I don't expect you to respond immediately. Take

your time and respond, just as a part of the default signature and I thought just such a small thing to do but it can be liberating if you had an email with that, it just sort of takes the pressure away from responding to it if you got that email at let's say 5:00 a.m., because that leader might be a morning person and you might have a different rhythm. So, it just felt like a very interesting micro change but something that can change the way people see you as a leader.

Darleen: Yeah, and I think those micro changes that's a great point are actually much more important in a virtual setting because people don't have the cues to really read nuances. So, things that might be perceived as urgent, you know, or going to be perceived as maybe extra urgent. And so, leaders have to role model the right behavior and I think that Uber example is a great example. Another CEO that we were talking to was telling us that he was going to actually request that employees come in two days a week, starting in September and then he said, and that's what I will, you know, recommend to the management team but I am going to be in five days a week and we said so and so CEO, do you realize that that's going to set unintended consequences. And so, it's the role modeling of behavior and anticipating possible consequences of things like sending a text at 5:00 a.m. or an email. And so, you really have to be more thoughtful and planful about how you engage with people.

DJ: Picking up on one of the things you said Darlene about how we communicate context or cues in a remote setting, what have you seen some of the interesting things that leaders do to ensure that the communication is packaged with cues and context both in the way it's sent and the way it's read?

Darleen: Yeah, I think that people this is an area people are struggling with. I think, in the very beginning of the pandemic, you know, people were really worried about their employees. So, they are checking in, they are having these big townhalls, they are doing surveys, they are gathering a lot of data and I think many organizations over-indexed on let's have a lot of virtual happy hours and too many meetings. And it was just like, let's just give you, we are trying to be communicative, but we went overboard and we are actually creating more stress and anxiety in the system when people are already busy. So, that was one thing we saw early on. I think, now we have seen a bigger shift that people have gotten used to the virtual setting and realized that your tone in an email or a text might be misconstrued. So, I have seen many good examples of leaders being more thoughtful, even things like, if your status on instant messaging is red meaning you are in a meeting, don't ping someone just because you have a sense of urgency and need to do that, send an email or have a delayed send on your email. Be... re reading things. Don't send an email if it might have any significant news in it or anything that might lead to conflict or feedback in emails; I used to see really bad examples of this where leaders would actually try to coach people through email and you and I might say, well, that's just ineffective, but I believe that a lot of the communications get distorted with technology and have what we call a neutrality bias. So, if you think the intent of your message is positive, it might be perceived as neutral. If you think it's neutral it's more likely to be perceived as negative. And so, best-in-class leaders are very thoughtful with their communication, are picking up the phone when it's a more sensitive issue, having calls or video chats with people, those types of things are really important to help detect cues.

DJ: Hmm, and I guess there are two choices, right? One is, is the communication synchronous or asynchronous and second is, is it just text or is it layered with voice and visuals. So, I guess, leaders have an opportunity to make the choice on both fronts to transmit cues.

Darleen: Absolutely and what we say is match your technology to the task. So, for things that are complex like coaching, conflict management and even some types of brainstorming doing that on a... it's a very synchronous tool like video conferencing is going to be the richest like face-to-face, right? It's the closest to face-to-face that we have right now for most of us. Using things like email just to

summarize your points and having a meeting where you need a dialogue and you need people to actually make decisions and problem-solve don't bring people together just to have a meeting. So, I think again, what we saw early on and you may have seen Microsoft's big article recently, they did a huge analysis of technology over the last year, meetings have gone up, you know, hundreds of... and the percentage increase in meetings is ridiculous. The use of instant messages is way up and what they basically concluded is people aren't using technology effectively and they are not necessarily being thoughtful about their audience like you were saying earlier with the Uber example. So, there's so much information and digital overload and fatigue right now that leaders have to be much more cognizant of when and how to interact using some of these technologies.

DJ: And you actually in the book talk about your conversation with Jeff Teper from Microsoft, the leader of the Teams communication platform and you talk about the rhythm of a business and ensuring that the meetings are in line with the rhythm. Can you say a little more about the nuance here in terms of what you have observed about how organizations should think about cadence and their meeting schedules?

Darleen: Yeah, and it goes a little bit back to what you were saying Deepak about the Uber example. So, looking at how business gets done and not just doing something because it's convenient for you. So, if I want to send an email at 5 a.m. because I need to get it off my plate and I will feel better that's probably not going to be really helpful or a great role model for people when I am telling them to have some work-life balance. So, you have got to really look at the way that the organization works, what's the cadence, making sure that people are not feeling like they are overloaded with information and there's just so many technologies right now. It's not about having some glamorous technology; it really comes down to using technology well. And so, what Jeff talked about in relation to that rhythm of business comment that he made in the book, it's like you have got to look at your team, look at decisions that have to be made, the flow of information, and then match the technology to the task, making sure that the team is onboard with how to use technology and tools and also then periodically re-evaluating that over time as your business evolves.

DJ: Hmm, and moving topics Darlene, in the book you refer to Charles Handy who says that the office of the future will resemble more of a clubhouse, a place for meeting, greeting and eating and rooms reserved for activities and not for people. What are you seeing around how organizations are thinking about getting back into a world of hybrid work, online and offline?

Darleen: Yeah, and by the way, that's one of my favorite quotes that was actually in my book in 2011, because I was very fascinated by Charles Handy's research, which really originated on building trust digitally. So, I was really fascinated with that for a long time, and I think frankly Deepak, that is more true now than when I wrote the first book in 2011. And it's interesting what we conclusively know and you have probably seen this in other research is that the hybrid model is here to stay. So, you know, you may have some organizations who are much more office-centric especially with an apprenticeship model and they are going to really expect people to come back more fully. In the middle, you have got this hybrid model, where you have got some people in and some people with flexible arrangements and maybe a blend of both. And then on the other end of the continuum, you have organizations who are a bit more progressive, who are saying, you know what, you can work virtually for at least, you know, some period of time or forever and that degree of flexibility varies tremendously. What we do know at least as of right now looking at the data from different companies is that about 75 percent of companies are going to fall in the middle. So, you might have some outliers but in general many organizations are thinking about how do I lead and manage in a hybrid model, which is the most difficult model to manage in because it presents challenges around equity and fairness. And so, what we clearly know is that it's not a one-size-fits-all approach, but there's implications for companies who try to go back to normal because as Handy's...

DJ: And when you say equity and fairness, what do you have in mind, Darlene?

Darleen: Well, what we know from other research is that there's different power dynamics. If you are one of the individuals who is always in the office let's say with your manager, you might have more access to projects, you might get promoted more. It's the idea that if you are out of sight and you are virtual you might be out of mind.

DJ: Got it.

Darleen: Or things like, if you are not at the conference table in a meeting and you are in your home office, how is that an even-playing field? So, there's a whole... I mean, this is like or every conversation I have right now with CEOs and CHROs is about this equity. It's a huge hot topic right now. But the one point I did want to make is that companies who really try to go back to the way that they were are going to have issues from a talent perspective, you know, because most people want a higher degree of flexibility than ever before and we are seeing companies be much more thoughtful about the role of the office. So, Charles Handy even said, you know, what's the role of the office? At Spencer Stuart, we are talking about the power of place. We want our offices to be places where people come to collaborate, perhaps to coach, and to connect with one another, but it's not going to look like it did pre-pandemic, at least for us and that's the case for most organizations. So, how do you create an office that excites people where people want to go? So, a lot of clients are rethinking their real estate footprint commercially and are hoteling and rearranging the offices to foster collaboration and create the space that allows people to interact with one another. And they are even doing things like rethinking what amenities they offer, having more outdoor space, having more space for people to meditate, I mean, all types of things, and we are really seeing a big shift in this Deepak, so it's quite interesting.

DJ: And any interesting experiments on the edge that you see Darlene, given people are slowly beginning to come back?

Darleen: I think... I don't know if it's an experiment but I mean we have seen a number of examples and these are in the press about organizations being too specific too early on about what's going to happen. And I don't know if you saw the McKinsey article that talked about communication is more important right now because there's a high degree of anxiety and fatigue in the workforce and we know people want more flexibility at least in some form. So, even if as a company you don't know what's going to happen, it's better to say that and be authentic and genuine than to say we want everyone back in September and then say in September, okay, we are going to have to pivot and do this. People, that is causing extreme anxiety and so there's... I have seen some tremendously great examples of how to message this and say we don't know exactly where we are going to go but here's what we are thinking, the office is going to look different, work is going to look different, and we know we are going to offer more flexibility. We are in this together, we are trying to figure out what that's going to look like and we are going to get your point of view and see what you think and we are going to shape this together versus some companies who are very publicly saying we are all coming back, this is the way it's going to be and they may have issues from a talent retention standpoint. So, I think, these are really important considerations and my advice would be, don't put a stake in the ground too soon because you may not have all the answers and we don't know necessarily what's going to happen in the next, you know, 9 to 12 months.

DJ: And that's okay, right? And that's the point you are making, it's okay to be vulnerable to say, you know, we are still figuring it out, there are enough unknown unknowns and being authentic and vulnerable, probably trumps a missense of misplaced confidence is the point you are making.

Darleen: That's exactly right, a much better way to say it that I did but that's exactly right. And I would add the companies who are doing it better are taking a pulse and really checking in with their employees, because as you know Deepak, this is a change management strategy as well. You have got to get buy-in for the change, and so, I think, for many organizations they are just sort of making the decision and saying this is what we are going to do and many other organizations are being much more thoughtful and really thinking about how do we build culture? How do we keep people engaged? How do we take a pulse and see how people are feeling over the next 12 months?

DJ: In the book, you also refer to Yanbing Li, VP of Engineering at Google Cloud who first said with this pandemic we are all in the same storm but possibly in different boats. And that quote really struck me, it sort of captures the diversity of experiences people have around this pandemic. What's that meant in terms of leadership, especially in a remote context? How do we lead when people are in different boats?

Darleen: Yeah, that's a great question and I do love that quote. I think now more than ever again leadership is more complex than ever but we have seen tremendous examples of leaders step up and demonstrate vulnerability and authenticity, great levels of transparency and now the bar has really been elevated. In our CEO practice, our CEO profiles are... there's so much in there that boards want now, right, but the... whatever we used to think about in terms of capabilities, now there's all these other things, the leadership side has taken on even greater importance. And so, we have seen really great examples of leaders actually slowing down and taking time to learn about their team members maybe, you know, they don't have a home office or they have got their kids at home, really connecting with people in a more authentic way and engaging with empathy. Some great examples: one Chief Commercial Officer at a global pharma company encourages his team to just get out from behind their computers when he wants to talk to them and say let's go on a walk together and let's have a coaching chat. So, really engaging with people on issues that extend beyond work because of covid and all the other things that people have been dealing with over the last 16 months. So, I have seen some awesome examples of leaders truly stepping up and frankly now there's an expectation that's been set and so it's going to be hard to go back to anything else.

DJ: Hmm, and you have briefly alluded to boards. I am also curious about how this remote work has impacted boards in terms of how they meet the kinds of issues they discuss, the way they come to a judgement and just the whole dynamic. Any headline observations at a board level?

Darleen: Yeah, I mean and Jim my co-author who runs our CEO succession practice has some awesome stories. I mean, he recruited the CEO of eBay during the crisis and the board never met the candidate. So, I think, you know, Spencer Stuart and other companies are working with boards and I think boards have actually adapted and realized that this is not, not for every single board, we don't necessarily need to fly everyone together as often, we can do some things virtually and we can actually be quite productive. I do think right now we are seeing a resurgence of corporate governance and like refocusing on CEO succession now that we have gotten through the pandemic, CEO succession during crisis tends to be flat because most boards are not really going to disrupt anything but we are starting to see a bigger trend towards boards actually really coming back and revisiting their future corporate governance strategy. But we have seen some really good examples of boards who made these transitions to, you know, the virtual structure very simply.

DJ: On this piece, I also spoke to Atul Bhandari (Atul) who is a Partner based in Spencer Stuart's New Delhi office and leads the Technology, Media, Telecommunications & Services (TMT&S) Practice across Asia Pacific. Atul also serves on Spencer Stuart's global Board of Directors. I spoke to him about how the Board agenda has evolved over the last 15 odd months since Covid struck

Atul: *"In terms of the agenda items, I thought, as I said, it started out more with, okay, how do we continue to maintain our operations given all the external things that are going on. From there, it shifted to this has significant impact on people, their lives, their families, how do we take care of our people. From there on, it has evolved over the last six months into, you know, there are permanent shifts that are impacting our business model and operating model and how do we look at that. The role of technology, I think that has probably been one of the things. I think the pandemic has supercharged technology adoption across all aspects of business, unlike any other event, you know, the whole sudden shift to work from home. Again, lots of initial challenges, many companies struggled, likewise, we did as well and specially in India, you know, the teams were, you know, we do not have environments at our home that are conducive to work from home. And all of a sudden within a few weeks, it just took a few weeks and businesses adapted well within the context of their operating models. And now boards are encouraging companies to embrace technology across the entire value chain. So whether it is, you know, you can use all the fancy terms, Industry 4.0, digital transformation, etc., etc., the reality is that the way technology has become an important agenda item on the board's discussion slate, is very interesting. At the same time, the whole focus on sustainability, value creation, that has not changed. In fact, if anything, I think as boards, we must now step up, we need to reinvent ourselves."*

DJ: Ritu Kochhar (Ritu) heads the Financial Services and Boards practice in India and is the Head of Private Equity practice in Asia Pacific. She spoke about how Boards have started focusing much more on ESG and on risk mitigation across the various elements of the business.

Ritu: *"You have not necessarily seen something completely different come up, at least from the larger traditional companies, which is a lot of the subset that we are seeing. What there has been is maybe a shift in, say, the topics that they have been thinking. We did not earlier, you know, the talk around ESG, sustainability, how should they actually be thinking about the charter of a risk committee and what all it should actually be covering, and then the focus on just, you know, how are we actually thinking about crisis management. I can tell you I was with a lot of the board evaluations that we were actually doing, one key area that used to come out is just, you know, most places did not always have a crisis response plan in place. They would have one but it was not fleshed out to the extent it should be, right. And you talked about some macro risk, you talked about industry risk, but you did not see a big crisis response plan across the board. And we saw a big shift in this particular case by a lot of boards. Just thinking about it and, you know, this is across the board, whether it is manufacturing, IT services or broader, sort of, metal mining, across the board. That was one thing that had been a missing link and we saw a lot more focus on making sure that is actually developed. Second, just reviewing the charters of risk committee, which, you know, and making sure that the things that they had not necessarily thought about earlier. And so the innovation you actually saw was more in, you know, when you highlighted some of these risk, how do you think about agenda. For example supply chain, what is it, how does a company de-risk itself from that and it was not earlier thought about because where, it was not just the pandemic, this, to some extent, also came at a time when you were seeing a shift in global macro politics. And you combine the two, a lot of global companies with complex supply chains got impacted by this and they had not necessarily thought of this double shift together. So that is where innovation was driven more where the boards actually put this on the agenda, but it was actually driven more in companies."*

DJ: While the Board agenda has evolved in the last few months, I think the last few months have also led to a certain set of skillsets at the Board level which have become a lot more critical. Atul Bhandari (Atul) speaks about this here.

Atul: *"If we look at the boards spec I think the whole extension of having people who understand technology potential impact of technology on business model the need for security especially as*

*business models become more and more digital and technology driven is definitely one archetype of a board profile that is becoming increasingly sort after. The second archetype that again is becoming quite sort after is people who understand people deeply, understand what motivates employees succession issues. How do you make sure that you have sustainable leadership teams? So you know the NRC's are being strengthen now with looking at people who have been CHRO's in their past life. Infect in many way the pandemic has broad the role of the CHRO to the front and center of the organization and I believe that has continued at the board level and I would say the third thing partially drive by some of the global events and something that was very high on every board agenda is the whole notion of the diversity, equity and inclusiveness. So I would say from a spec perspective those are the three big areas with technology becoming the center of a lot of the future business models and operating models and hence boards are increasingly looking at people with a deep orientation towards technology and how technology impacts business models and customer interactions."*

DJ: The other piece that has evolved in the last few months is the way the Boards have engaged with the Management teams in companies.

Ritu: *"I think two things which we started seeing the boards actually also do a lot more, which is communication with the management team. In a few cases where we saw the boards actually also communicate not just with the CEO and the core management team but broader being part of town halls as well in a few cases. Because the frequency of communication and that is where the innovation was probably more driven in the communication part of it than anything else to some extent, you know, how do you actually do town halls and have board members be involved, facilitate a lot more interaction. I think that is why we are saying it was a lot in the logistics piece of it, but overcommunication versus more controlled communication was the mantra particularly early on. I think now you are seeing a little bit where people have become more comfortable in just driving some of these and it has become part of life. But initially, a lot of organizations, you know, some I should say struggled with it and the others actually adapted to it fairly fast and that is where the whole, having a nimble agile board, which earlier nobody would actually think of, also matters to some extent."*

DJ: Now lets get back to the Darleen DeRosa

DJ: And in the book, you also say that the virtual setting has negatively impacted the CEOs much more than the non-CEOs. I was reflecting on that insight and I was wondering what some of the factors might be which might have led to this. Would you have some hypotheses around why the CEOs might be impacted more than the non-CEOs?

Darleen: Yeah. I mean, I think, Jim and I talk about this and I think even just anecdotally in the interviews that we did and this isn't true for every single CEO. Certain industries clearly were hit harder in the pandemic like hospitality and leisure, for example, so this isn't true across the board but it was interesting. Most CEOs felt like the transition to virtual work and the benefits of it were quite good, but not surprisingly, work-life balance was much more disruptive for CEOs. And I think by the way, we wouldn't say that you expect CEOs to have tremendous work-life balance. We wouldn't necessarily like feel badly, but by the same token, you know, you are leading during a global pandemic with a range of economic and political issues in the landscape. And I do think that this put even more of a burden on CEOs. So greater levels of burnout, even less work-life balance and so examples of one CEO that we interviewed for the book talked about how many global townhalls he had to do in the first three months of the crisis. I mean, it's just constant crisis management. And so, I think, that some of the data is probably attributed to this very difficult point in time. And then

some of it is that, you know, again, CEOs are going to feel more pressure. So, I wouldn't say that what we found is isolated to the virtual environment.

DJ: Lovely. Moving on Darlene, you know, some professions are based on apprenticeship including search that I was a part of and you are a part of a search firm and a leadership advisory firm and that often requires physical proximity. I was curious what are some of the trends you are seeing in terms of nurturing a culture of apprenticeship in these times?

Darleen: Yeah, absolutely. And again, we definitely can relate to this at Spencer Stuart. In our own data we had a power of place task force and I was on that as we were going through the last 16 months and that notion of apprenticeship definitely was something we saw very clearly in the feedback. And I think one of the things that we have started to do much more proactively again, it comes back to being planful and thoughtful is finding ways for people to have communities of practice. So, let's say I am in the healthcare practice, how am I having pods where I get to check-in with my colleagues and we can learn and we put people on projects together to really... even in a virtual setting you can have an apprenticeship model, you just have to be more thoughtful about it. So, we have seen some organizations do things like create culture buddies, where you can pair people up, it could be like peer mentoring but it could be someone who's highly tenured with someone coming newly into the organization and making sure that they feel like they have got that apprenticeship structure. There's been a lot more of a focus on leadership development and mentoring and a lot of organizations have pivoted and rethought their investments and training and I have been doing that virtually. So, again, this isn't new for many big companies but for some companies they didn't have these processes in place. So, I think, the other thing that we have been seeing is that companies have been much more focused on making sure their leaders have a coaching, the coaching skills to be effective in a virtual setting because we know that giving people feedback is one of the biggest items that drives employee engagement. So, a lot of our clients from a leadership development perspective are focused on helping their leaders build a coaching skill in an apprenticeship culture. So, again, there's not, it's not a simple fix but I do think there's a number of things that companies have done and are doing to really try to replicate that apprenticeship culture.

DJ: I also got a chance to speak with Rohit Kale (Rohit) who leads SpencerStuart in India. He spoke about the impact of the remote working situation on a profession like Executive Search where apprenticeship is a big part of the equation when it comes to development of colleagues.

Rohit: *"I think the apprenticeship and learning therefore has been impacted significantly. The fact is that if, in a professional services context where apprenticeship is key, being able to be part of every discussion, being able to be part of discussions that you are not even technically invited to, for example, somebody sitting next to you and watching what they are going through, or being able to bounce off ideas with others, is a huge part of the apprenticeship process. I do think that has suffered. On the other hand, I have also seen an impact where given that every client meeting is now an online meeting, we are seeing a lot more participation of a research team and are our team in every progress review, whereas earlier, many of these progress reviews would happen at client's site and as a result, would be only with the consultant and the client. And therefore, we are also seeing that the research group now has a lot more exposure to both business development meetings, as well as progress reviews. So in some hands, we can see that the exposure has increased and that has helped apprenticeship. On the other hand, the peer learning aspect of it has been significantly impacted."*

DJ: Now lets get back to the Darleen DeRosa

DJ: And just picking up from one of the things you mentioned Darlene, a leader transitioning in the first 90 days, 100 days, I am assuming it's much harder in a remote context where you haven't met people, you haven't as one of the Professor Sumantra Ghoshal says you haven't smelt the place so you don't get a sense of the culture and how things get done. What have you seen about transitions in a remote context that we are seeing? Any headline insights around what leaders and organizations should bear in mind to make this effective?

Darleen: Yeah, I mean we have had to do a lot of this at Spencer Stuart both in our Search and the Coaching practice that we are working in, but I think there's a number of interesting things that companies have done. As an example, one CEO said, he literally would change his video background to sort of make it look like he was in his Switzerland office one day and he got off to such a fast start because rather than taking three months to travel to every office, he could do the same thing in a month and so he could have so many video meetings that were much more effective and one-on-one meetings by the way where he has bigger reach in terms of the employee population plus a number of townhalls and said, he would never go back to the way he was doing it before. That's just one example of how yes, it's harder and you have got to be more thoughtful, but there can be a lot of efficiency if you do it well. And so, we have seen some really interesting examples of organizations who have done a nice job rethinking their onboarding strategy. So, sending people care packages to help them understand the culture of the organization even before they join and sending care packages. So, it's not like you are just getting a laptop, you are getting things that help you understand and learn about the company. We have seen some organizations hiring and creating new roles to really think about onboarding and culture. And so, we at Spencer Stuart, for example, have seen some clients create roles like Head of Remote Work or Head of Culture, because this is really important from an onboarding perspective. Some organizations have created, as I mentioned earlier, culture buddies or onboarding liaisons that are helping guide people throughout the journey and even things like cohort-based onboarding programs for mid to senior level leaders so people feel connected from day one. So, I think, those are just a few of the things. Leaders who we coach, who really are thoughtful about this and set up a series of one-on-one and group meetings to rapidly build trust and foster those relationships clearly are more effective than those who don't. So, again, it comes back to Deepak that notion of being purposeful and being thoughtful, but we have seen some great examples of people onboarding virtually very successfully.

DJ: I discussed this piece with some of the colleagues from SpencerStuart India. Atul Bhandari (Atul) spoke about how companies are assigning two kinds of mentors (formal and informal) and we need to pick them differently.

Atul: *"That is a much harder one, Deepak, because, you know, culture is all about how does the workplace function. It is the subtle nuances that you observe at the workplace, the way things get done. How do you do that in the virtual world, it is much harder to replicate to be very honest. What we have seen people do effectively is get people to meet lot more people even before they join. So the onboarding process which traditionally used to start once you formally join, now people are saying it is important for me to get to know who I am going to be working with. So let us not wait till the individual formally joins, let us actually start that. The other thing that we have observed is to assign both a formal and an informal mentor who can kind of be your, you know, one who you can talk to at 2 p.m. in the afternoon, the other who you can have a very candid conversation at 11 o'clock in the night about how you are feeling about things. So those are a few things that companies have done. You cannot completely replace the physical element. Having said that, we have seen lots of CEOs and CXOs onboard over the last 12 months and done so effectively."*

DJ: And maybe just picking up on the point about the 11 p.m. informal mentor, any perspectives around how to pick that?

Atul: *"Couple of things, I think one, it is somebody where they will build a very strong comfort level quickly or typically somebody that you have known from your past life who, you know, because it has got to be somebody that you trust and somebody that you are comfortable with, so those two are critical criteria. And again, it is not going to happen in each and every situation, Deepak. So you need to be cognizant of that."*

DJ: Rohit Kale (Rohit) makes an interesting point here. He says that the interviewing process has become more elaborate these days but that also gives more touchpoints for the candidate when he or she comes on board. So, in a way the widening of the interviewing pool is not only helping in decisioning but also in integration.

Rohit: *"I think one of the insights has been that the integration actually starts even before the hiring decision is made. What I mean by that is given that most interviews are anyway Zoom interviews, remote interviews now, we are seeing the number of interviews that every candidate has to go through increasing exponentially. That allows a) of course, it is part of risk mitigation in the hiring process, but more importantly, it actually allows that individual to get a far better sense of what the overall peer group in the office looks like, starts getting connects with the peer group at a much earlier level and brings the peer group into the decision making process and therefore gets the alignment and therefore gets the buy in from those individuals, even before the hiring decision is made. That allows the hiring and, you know, that just allows that there is a bigger group of people who now have a vested interest in making that individual successful because you have got the buy in earlier."*

DJ: Sahiba Singh (Sahiba) speaks about how some companies are using this as an opportunity to be a bit more deliberate and reflective about their culture.

Sahiba: *"So yeah, we are seeing this a lot and what this situation has led organizations to do more about is think about what their culture really is and how do they describe it to people who have not had the opportunity to, as you say, smell the culture or learn by observations. So more than ever before, clients are thinking about how do we translate, what our actual culture is into, how things work on the ground. So telling new employees about how we run meetings, how decisions are taken, how we communicate, what do we do, what do we not do and really thinking about their culture. And in that process what is also happening is more clients as they are articulating how things work today, they are also becoming more reflective about how things should work and what is wrong, how can they use this opportunity to actually fix it or change things that they have been wanting to change in their culture."*

DJ: If you are curious about setting leaders up for success in a new environment, I would point you to three resources at the podcast.

- 1) First is a conversation with Prof Michael Watkins, the author of First 90 days, often considered the bible of transitions and Professor at IMD Lausanne
- 2) Second is a conversation with R Gopalakrishnan, veteran leader in the Tata Group and HUL and the author of CRASH – Lessons from Entry and Exit of CEOs, where he has studied 15 high profile CEO appointments that went south

- 3) Finally, I would point you to the Curated Playlist – Settling into a new context, which has wisdom from a variety of sources ranging including how Gandhiji thought about settling into India after his stint in South Africa.

For the two speakers, you can go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and find Michael Watkins and R Gopalakrishnan in the Guests section. For the Curated Playlist, go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com), access the tab Curated Playlists and within that you will find Settling into a new context under the category of Transitions. Lets now get back to the conversation with Darleen DeRosa.

DJ: And picking one of the things you said Darlene, one-on-ones versus townhalls, do you see that mix shifting in the remote work context as compared to the physical work context?

Darleen: You know that's a good question, I am not sure. I don't know if I have seen enough examples of that. I think, I mean, we have seen more townhalls in the last 16 months but I think that that could be because of covid and trying to bring people together and foster community since people were not in an office. So, it will be interesting to see what happens but we have definitely seen an increase in those larger group type meetings and really bringing people together because you can do that really efficiently when you are virtual.

DJ: Hmm, it's much, it has much less friction to organize these conversations across geographies and time zones.

Darleen: Exactly, yeah, and I think a lot of organizations have done that really well like using technology with a purpose and trying to bring people together to both help maybe help them build a skill or to help them interact with one another. So, using technology well I think has been really some good examples of that versus companies who are just using technology without really thinking about like why they are bringing people together, just having a townhall for a townhall or having a townhall where maybe people have no form to engage. So, I have seen varying levels of success with this.

DJ: Got it. And moving to a different theme leadership assessment, which in a way it's sort of meat and potatoes at firms like Egon Zehnder and Spencer Stuart. I was talking to one of my friends in the search industry and he was saying that there's a certain kind of candidate who ends up presenting well in the online medium as compared to the real world and therefore it becomes even more important for us to ensure we don't get biased by how people present in an online medium. What would have you observed about assessment and judging leadership capabilities in the remote context?

Darleen: Yeah, and I think in many ways at least in the searches that we are doing, we are seeing a lot more of an interest in assessment maybe for a slightly different reason. But to your point, I mean, people whether your virtual or not people can interview well and we have known this right? And you know this from your time at Egon Zehnder. I mean, some people just interview better than others. So, a lot of our clients are really rethinking their assessment approach to make sure that it's multi-dimensional. And because of those leadership traits that I talked about earlier being much more important right now to many organizations, especially boards who are recruiting CEOs and senior execs wanting people who are authentic, who can engage people even despite the distance, there's a lot of those personal characteristics that boards are now really focused on integrity, you know, those things have always been important, but they are more important than ever. And so, a lot of boards and clients are using more multi-dimensional personality assessments and other types of assessments that go beyond just an interview where people might be particularly skilled in an

interview or presentation and you might not be looking at the whole person. So, that's something we have clearly seen.

DJ: Atul Bhandari (Atul) of SpencerStuart India speaks about how interviewing in a remote world requires you to dig into stories and context much more than you would otherwise. He also speaks about the criticality of referencing.

Atul: *"So couple of things, one, it is very important to go deep into the stories that the candidates are telling us. And when I mean stories, it is about how have they created impact and in what environments they have created impact, which is what we used to do earlier as well by the way, nothing has changed on that. But just going a level deeper because you are not able to pick up some of those body language signals, has become very important. Secondly, I think the whole assessment has become lot more multi-dimensional, moving away just from an interaction, and what do I mean by that. So there is lot more focus on referencing today. In fact, not just us but even clients are keen to do references directly because that is where in the absence of meeting somebody physically, because typically in an interview process, you would meet somebody five-six times, you get multiple points of view, everyone would pick up a different interesting nugget that they picked up whether it was the eye contact, the body language, it is much harder to do on a screen. It is much harder to pick out some of those nuances when you are doing 10 to 12 Zoom meetings in a day. So that referencing has become extremely important."*

DJ: Ritu Kochhar (Ritu) of SpencerStuart India speaks about the opening up of the aperture of recruitment given people could be productive from remote locations.

Ritu: *"In general if you ask me when it comes to taking decisions around hiring and, you know, I think most organizations which is good, not all but quite a few organizations have actually also started thinking about what the future of work will look like in their organization. And I think that has opened up the thinking a bit. I am not just talking about say just a CXO level talent but we are seeing organizations be a little bit more flexible. So you either have the work from home or you have the hybrid model or you have in some cases, so for example for tech companies, so there is this, you know, financial services company which wanted to set up a core digital led platform and this is Mumbai-based, traditionally they would have wanted everybody to relocate to Mumbai, right. Here, they are hiring people from Bangalore, Hyderabad, they have become so comfortable with that particular piece that they are happy to have an organization which works very differently than what their traditional financial services organization has actually looked like. So in some respect, it has actually opened up on how people think about some of these things in the new dynamic workplace and working models as we are talking about it."*

DJ: Rohit Kale (Rohit) speaks about how hiring from different areas is actually helping drive the diversity agenda.

Rohit: *"We all know, you know, finding, for example, hiring financial services talent into non-Mumbai locations is difficult. Similarly, finding digital talent in Mumbai is difficult and suddenly, you are saying, well, they do not need to come to Mumbai, they can continue to be based in Bangalore. It suddenly opens up the vista for the kind of talent that you could potentially bring into your company."*

DJ: He actually goes on to speak about how hiring in the remote world has led to people leaning more towards experience than potential.

Rohit: *"Where you are hiring for example completely new, you know, somebody from a completely different sector or a function into a role, it is that much harder. The familiarity that people bring into the role, kind of also has an impact on how successful that person is in a remote hiring and a remote integration scenario. And therefore, what we have seen, particularly the impact of the last is actually something that I am not very happy about is because people are defaulting to experience versus potential. They just feel that much more comfortable that the person knows what they are talking about, we are not betting too much on the potential of the person but we are hiring for what that person knows."*

DJ: This is possibly driven by the fact that the leader coming in as a shakier scaffolding to work with in the context of the transition. So focusing more on experience than potential is possibly a risk mitigation approach in these times. Now let's get back to the Darleen DeRosa

DJ: In the book you also talk about the notion of digital bonfires and you refer to Discovery's David Zaslav, where he got experts from different parts of the world and got the organization together. At the same time, I hear there's a little bit of webinar fatigue that people are experiencing. So, what have you seen about once again purposeful engagement and this concept of digital bonfires, if you could expand on that?

Darleen: Yeah, absolutely. And I think I touched on this a little bit before but I do think in the beginning leaders were much more cognizant of trying to bring people together and did not always do it with the right focus or the right cadence. And in the beginning, I think, a lot of people felt obligated like to attend a, you know, virtual event. So, I think, in the very beginning of the pandemic companies again spent too much time on that and now people are really realizing that that can have unintended consequences. So, being much more thoughtful about bringing people together again, that community of purpose, people who have similar goals, similar things that they might be working on, similar interests. So, a lot more peer mentoring. We have seen a lot of organizations invest in guest speakers and education to keep developing people because right now there's been an actual surge in an interest in people's own development and growth. And one thing you can do pretty easily in a virtual environment is try to replicate that. So, we have seen a lot of companies inviting guest speakers, having leadership panels, things that help people develop but are not necessarily, they don't feel like it's mandatory and doesn't put an extra burden on people. So, I think, what's good is that we have now realized over time the right balance and cadence of how and when to bring people together. And to your point, it's got to be purposeful and it has to add value.

DJ: Got it. And just coming to how we manage our energy in these times Darlene, you know, initially when we started remote work around the pandemic, there was a sense of the fact that we weren't commuting, there was a lot of time released and we were able to spend time with family. So, there was a little bit of a, if I may, mini celebration at the early part but very quickly I realized that myself included it has actually gotten more intense and more stressful and people are working harder and the sense of fatigue in the system seems to be much higher than what it was maybe 15-20 months back. What have you seen about leaders managing their energy in these times?

Darleen: Yeah, that's a great question. So, I think, we have seen a range of things and we would agree by the way, we saw that exact trend and the data suggests that and Microsoft study also suggests that these huge productivity numbers at many companies are masking that extreme burnout and fatigue. And so, I think, leaders and one thing we talk about a lot is in a virtual world you have to really be your own CEO. You have got to manage your calendar, you have got to create balance and if you are leading a team as we have talked about earlier, you have got to role model that behavior. So, if you are telling people don't work on a weekend, you shouldn't be firing off a ton of emails on the weekend. And we have also, you have probably read in the news, a bunch of

organizations have actually been so focused on mental health and work-life balance that they have given people a week off, everybody in the company the same week so that they don't feel pressure to work. I mean, there's not been like a ton of those examples, but those examples are actually quite profound of really encouraging people to have balance because people have worked so hard for so long. One leader that I am coaching actually encourages his team every Friday to take a half-day and just do something with their family or do something on their own. He also encourages them to block time in their calendar to get work done and has meeting free days. So, I think, that there's a number of interesting things that I have seen, but again, not all leaders follow this. And I think the critical thing in my mind is that the best leaders really role model this behavior.

DJ: Sahiba Singh (Sahiba) from SpencerStuart has an interesting insight around how we think about calendaring various activities.

Sahiba: *"I think most leaders have been used to calendaring work. Now we see most people calendaring work and life to make sure that they can maintain, whether some people will call it work-life separation, some people will call it work-life assimilation because the days have just continued to stretch on both sides and everybody has to be a lot more deliberate about how they are spending their time. So one aspect is just me time and fitness, people are constantly interacting on Zoom calls through the day and then without a commute at the middle, they are going back to their families, kids and sort of taking care of those aspects. So there is one leader that I know who is completely particular about calendaring his runs because for him, that is the only me time that he gets, it is the time he gets to think about his workday. So that is something that we see quite often. There is another client of us and she is absolutely clear that she has set aside her children's bedtime as non-negotiable, no meetings can get scheduled, no calls, etc. So I think we are all finding out different ways in which we work best. And it is also interesting that this also allows us to play to our preferences of how we like to work. So I am not a morning person at all and I love the fact that I can actually work my calendar in the day that I can start slightly later and work till later as well, so that is one thing that I see quite often."*

DJ: In a way, remote work completely changes the role of an EA. It moves from keeping you productive at work to really taking complete ownership of your life which includes work. This includes solving for exercise, family time, reflection time, breathing time between meetings and much more.

Atul: *"Your EA is your best friend while you are doing this because she is the one who, for example, I have probably the most amazing EA in this world who will factor in one hour breaks on my calendar just so that I can go get some fresh air, get a coffee. If the calendar starts looking really bad, she will herself start kind of pushing things out a little bit."*

DJ: Sahiba Singh (Sahiba) also makes an interesting point about the need for proactively solving for a Support System in these times.

Sahiba: *"We have always spoken about leaders needing to have a support system and somewhere when you are going to the office, you are meeting with your colleagues, your leadership teams, etc., that support system of opportunity to connect with people, talk to people, discuss things, was almost organically built into the day. Now given the situation where most people are actually more under stress than before and in some ways disconnected from people in terms of just banging into them in the elevator or whatever, people have to be more, particularly leaders have to be more deliberate about making sure that they have a support system that they can rely on for advice to use as sounding boards. And that can take the form of their colleagues across the globe, that can take the*

*form of coaches, mentors, that can take the form of sometimes family members that you discuss issues with, but you have to be a lot more deliberate about it than before."*

DJ: Now lets get back to the Darleen DeRosa.

DJ: And moving forward, Darlene, you talk about an article in Time Magazine that talks about a disturbing trend in the context of women in the workforce. In the book you also refer to an article in Time Magazine, Darlene, which talks about this disturbing trend, right, about 885,000 women left the workforce over a few months in 2020 while only 216,000 men exited during the same time period. However, in my conversations another school of thought that exists is digital work is making it easier for flexible working and therefore more women should possibly enter the workforce as a result. How do you see the dynamic from a gender perspective?

Darleen: Absolutely. I mean, I think, in general there's a lot of research that has shown that throughout the pandemic that it has been particularly hard on working moms. And again, I think this is a point in time due to this the pandemic because many people had no child care because the kids were home from school. You have got a global health crisis and many women exited the workforce as you said based on the Time Magazine article. I do think however, that over time the flexibility, which I think many employees now are really excited about will lead to women re-entering the workforce. I think the question that we have and others have talked about in their research is how long is that going to take? What's that re-entry going to look like? And so, you know, schools are opening back up. What is that going to look like over the next six months and assuming, you know, the pandemic is really ending then I think we will be in a much better place. And I think our concern and what we have put in the book is that this really could potentially set us back from a diversity perspective. So, we are hopeful because you are right, the technology and there's a lot more flexibility out there that should make it in some ways easier for working mothers, but I think, you know, part of this was complicated by the fact that we had a global health crisis and limited child care and schooling options.

DJ: Got it. Darlene, wrapping up, this podcast is titled Play to Potential. Just from your vantage point, given the research you have done in this and otherwise what's your headline take on people to play to their potential in these times?

Darleen: Yeah, first of all, I love that question. I think, for me and just based on the research we have done and talking to so many leaders during this global health crisis, the pandemic I think has caused so many people to rethink what is important to them. And you have seen that, you know, the sort of people being more thoughtful about their role and really reconsidering the role of work and having more balance. And so, I thought that that is actually great. If this may cause a shift in how we think about work and what does work look like in the future. So, for me, the other thing that I think is really important as you think about people playing to their full potential is that leaders should find their sense of purpose and really lead with that. Finding a role that leverages what motivates you and inspires you is going to really elevate your potential and make it easier for you to achieve whatever you are driven by. So, looking at what motivates you, what excites you, that's a natural place for you to leverage your potential. And I think leaders have used this crisis to really re-examine what's important to them and find that sense of purpose that I think is particularly important to playing to one's potential.

DJ: Lovely. On that note Darlene pleasure talking to you at the podcast. Thank you so much for making the time.

Darleen: Thank you, Deepak.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. I hope you found the conversation purposeful. A couple of messages before we wrap up.

If you are interested in receiving short 2 min extracts of wisdom from the podcast served up a couple of times a week, consider signing up by sending a Whatsapp message at **+918591452129**. I repeat the number is **+918591452129**. Here, we share short extracts across the various guests we have at the podcast. Typically, it is one small extract on a Wednesday and one on a Saturday.

Do also rate and review the show on Apple podcasts or wherever you consume the content. It might seem like a repetitive ask. But trust me it makes a big difference in people discovering this podcast amidst a lot of noise out there given the boom in the podcast supply in India in the last few months. It also helps us attract good quality speakers.

To know more about what is in the podcast archives and the advisory work I do, you could just visit [www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com)

Thank you and hope to have you tune into one of the subsequent conversations at the podcast. Bye now.

## End of transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

### RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Listening:** When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new". This is a quote by Dalai Lama. Several leaders talk about their experiences with listening and how they have grown with it. More specifically, leaders also reflect on the criticality of listening when transitioning into a new context. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Communication:** Communication and story-telling is at the essence of building culture in an organization. Lessons from an ad-guru, mythologist, armed forces officer, motivational speaker and more about how one could think about narrating compelling stories. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Context based leadership:** You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Staying relevant:** How do we stay relevant as we go through our journey is something that keeps a lot of us awake. This is both in the context of refreshing and rejuvenating ourselves over time and also ensuring that our skills and capabilities are fit for purpose in the world we live in and the future of work. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Effective Board Leadership:** Leaders share their perspectives on what it takes to be an effective Board member. They also discuss, how leaders should think about Board roles and make choices around which Boards they could potentially get into. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Coaching:** The business world is slowly waking up to the fact that just like in elite sports, there is a tremendous value to be unlocked by having an effective coach for a leader. It is not just about fixing issues but also about enabling the journey from Good to Great. Leaders across disciplines share their insights around how one should pick a coach and get the most out of such a relationship. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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

**Effective hiring:** Staffing up your leadership team thoughtfully is one of the key roles of a leader. However, the paradigm for hiring in the digital world is changing as we move towards a world where intrinsics are beginning to matter more and more. Leaders across domains share their insights on how one could hire effectively. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Spotting Potential:** As we move towards a world where intrinsic capabilities count for more and more, how we spot diamonds in the rough is a capability that will begin to matter more and more. This is as relevant for hiring as for investing. Leaders across disciplines share their insights on how they look for raw potential that can then be honed. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Work and life:** Leaders talk about how they think of work and life and manage to juggle the two. No universal answer here but a glimpse into how different people have framed this in their heads and have dealt with it. We all need to find what works for us individually. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Health and wellness:** As one of the guests at the podcast - Lynda Gratton - says, we all will live much longer given advancements in Health and Medicine. Given this, how we manage our health is a big part of our equation. Here, leaders share their perspective on the various elements of staying healthy. You can access the playlist [here](#).

## SIGN UP TO OUR COMMUNICATION

**Podcast Newsletter:** Join 1000s of leaders who benefit from the Podcast newsletter. Not more than 1-2 emails a month including keeping you posted on the new content that comes up at the podcast. High on signal, low on noise. Sign up for the podcast newsletter [here](#).

**Nuggets on Whatsapp:** We also have a **Podcast Whatsapp distribution group (+91 85914 52129)** where we share 2-3 nuggets a week from the Podcast archives to provoke reflection. If that is of interest, please click [here](#) and send a message stating “INTERESTED”. Do also add this number to your Phone Contacts so that we can broadcast our messages to you when we share a nugget.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Darleen DeRosa - Nuggets**

- 77.01 Darleen DeRosa - Relationships in a 2D world
- 77.02 Darleen DeRosa - Driving Accountability virtually
- 77.03 Darleen DeRosa - Communicating thoughtfully
- 77.04 Darleen DeRosa - Office of the future
- 77.05 Darleen DeRosa - Remote leadership with Boards
- 77.06 Darleen DeRosa - Remote apprenticeship
- 77.07 Darleen DeRosa - Transitioning remotely
- 77.08 Darleen DeRosa - Remote Leadership hiring
- 77.09 Darleen DeRosa - Managing your energy

### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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](#).

### **Disclaimer and clarification of intent behind the transcripts**

This written transcript of the conversation is being made available to make it easier for some people to digest the content in the podcast. Several listeners felt that the written format would be helpful. This may not make sense as an independent document. Very often spoken word does not necessarily read well. Several of the guests have published books and the language in their books might be quite different from the way they speak. We request the readers to appreciate that this transcript is being offered as a service to derive greater value from the podcast content. We request you not to apply journalistic standards to this document.

This document is a transcription obtained through a third party/voice recognition software. There is no claim to accuracy on the content provided in this document, and occasional divergence from the audio file are to be expected. As a transcription, this is not a legal document in itself, and should not be considered binding to advice intelligence, but merely a convenience for reference.

The tags that are used to organize the nuggets in the podcast are evolving and work in progress. You might find that there could be a discrepancy between the nuggets as referenced here and in the actual podcast given this is a static document.

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission.