



Guest

Katy Milkman is the James G. Dinan Professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and holds a secondary appointment at Penn's Perelman School of Medicine. Her research explores ways that insights from economics and psychology can be harnessed to change consequential behaviors for good, such as savings, exercise, vaccination take-up and discrimination. She has also recently authored the Book - *How to Change - The Science of Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*.

In 2018, she began hosting Charles Schwab's popular podcast "Choiceology with Katy Milkman", which explores key lessons from behavioral economics about decision making.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 79th 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.

In addition to curating this podcast, I work with leaders with a growth mindset as a Trusted Sounding Board helping them 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. That is www.playtopotential.com

My Guest this time is Katy Milkman. Katy a Professor at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and host of Charles Schwab's popular behavioral economics podcast *Choiceology*. Over the course of her career, she has worked with or advised dozens of organizations on how to spur positive change, including Google, the U.S. Department of Defense, the American Red Cross, 24 Hour Fitness, Walmart and Morningstar. She has recently published the book *How to Change: The Science of Getting From Where You are to Where You Want to Be*. This podcast conversation largely revolves around some of the insights from the book.

In this conversation, we speak about how we need to think about our change strategy in the context of the nature of change. She likens it to what Agassi did with the help of Brad Gilbert when he was trying to come out of a slump in form. Finding an approach depending on the nature of the opponent you are facing. We go on to talk about how we can find different kinds of fresh starts to embark on something new, something that Google used to drive change at scale. She also goes on to draw inspiration from the song "Spoonful of sugar makes the medicine goes down" from Mary Poppins to talk about how we can bundle different activities. We go on to speak about how we can have different commitment devices to keep us accountable. We also speak about the role of a little of flexibility to ensure that we build a robust habit rather than a brittle one. All this and more lined up ahead. Without further ado, let us tune into the conversation with Katy Milkman of Wharton.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I would love to talk about your book, Katy, *How to Change: The Science of Getting from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be*. But before that, in this podcast, we end up having conversations around people's journeys. Could you talk a little bit about how you ended up studying Behavioral Change after studying Operations Research and Financial Engineering in Princeton, and doing a PhD in Harvard's Joint Program in Computer Science and Business.

Katy Milkman (KM): Yes, so it was a funny transition and it really happened actually early in my PhD studies. I had no intention of studying Behavior Change but I was required in graduate school to take Microeconomic Theory at the graduate level as a core foundational class. And in the Microeconomics sequence I took at Harvard, there was a lot of emphasis placed on a new growing discipline, the discipline of Behavioral Economics and some of the insights from that field and how they could inform our understanding of Microeconomic Theory. And the insights included points like, people are more likely to overweigh the present than to weight it equally when making decisions. So they focus too much attention on the here and now, not enough on the long run and choice, and that can lead to mistakes in judgment. And we learned about the fact that people tend to find losses much more unpleasant than they find gains to be pleasing, so this is called loss aversion. These are the kinds of observations that were pointed out and I was really fascinated. I had not encountered any of this material as an undergraduate and I had always been skeptical of Economics because it seemed like it made a bunch of false assumptions about human nature and then went on to model the implications of those mathematically and make predictions. And since I was skeptical of its underpinnings, I thought the whole exercise was silly, which is part of why I became an engineer. When I saw this new field and recognized that actually there was work being done on creating valid underpinnings and then building models that could scale and predict things that were important to society, I got really excited and I started to think maybe actually there was a place for me in Economics and I, sort of, pivoted there. And then from Behavioral Economics to an interest in Behavior Change was actually not a very long trip, believe it or not. There was a new field within Behavioral Economics, right at the time I was at Harvard. About that time, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein had written a book called *Nudge*. Well, the book came out a little later, but they started writing it and writing articles based on it. The premise of the book is that we are all imperfect decision-makers in various ways and so if we recognize that and if policymakers recognize that, it behooves them to try to structure choices for people in a way that will help them make the best decisions. They will, you know, have a hardy retirement account to fall back on in retirement so that they will not smoke and become obese and so on, so that they will make choices that lead to healthy and happy lives. And I just found this absolutely fascinating. As an engineer by training, I had an appetite for understanding how do we improve systems and now to see that we could improve decisions, was just a small step sideways. I think that is kind of how I ended up in the field I am in there. There is more stories too but that is a general sense. It sounds from a million miles away like a really large pivot from being an engineer to someone who studies Human Behavior, but in reality, it was just a small turn in what I was looking at in graduate school that took me in this direction.

DJ: Fascinating. And you also run this podcast *Choiceology*, Katy. And one of the questions I am curious about is how people think about the question where to go, how they think about that choice as they move along in their journey. Based on your journey and some of the conversations you have had with your students, with some of your guests, with some of the economists, what are some of the insights you have gleaned around how we should think about this question at different points in time? Specifically, I am curious about how it plays out around mid-career when people are in their

30s-40s, where you have gotten a certain level of accomplishment, a decent level of material, let us say, outcomes, I see a lot of people stranded with a little bit of a deer in the headlights kind of a situation?

KM: Yeah, it is a really interesting point. I think the research that points to the most useful prescription related to this is research on something called escalation of commitment. Or the tendency we have to stick to a certain course of action beyond the point that would make sense according to sort of a strict rational actor economic model if you are taking everything into account. The reason we tend to escalate commitment, which would mean, you know, stay in a job long past the point where it is time to switch or stay in a career long past the time when, if you could really objectively evaluate everything, you would make a change. We tend to be stuck to our ways and part because we do not ignore some costs, so a cost that you have already taken on board. You know, you have gotten really used to all the people who you are working with, or you have gotten used to a certain type of technology that you use in your job, and you do not like the idea of having to learn something new. A sunk cost is an investment you have made, say in learning that technology or learning this set of people that is irrecoverable, you cannot get it back, you have already made it. And so actually when you think about moving forward, what you want to do is think about the costs and benefits in the future.

DJ: Marginal.

KM: Exactly, and totally ignore whatever costs are sunk, you cannot recover those costs. But we tend to think, oh, you know, but I would not be able to use my skills that I have developed in this new role and that will be such a waste or, you know, I will lose all these, those are not losses, those are sunk costs and you just need to think, okay, well, but net net, you know, you could go learn some new skills and start a new role, is that what is going to make you happy or is that what is going to create the most fulfillment, is that going to be what is best for you. So, because we overweigh sunk costs, we tend to escalate commitment. We also are creatures of habit. We really like to just stick with the status quo, whatever it is, we are used to, we feel like anything else is a loss relative to that. And I mentioned earlier, loss aversion, we tend to find losses more unpleasant than gains are pleasant, so that leads us to stick where we are more than we should. Between those things, we see this tremendous inertia. People not being willing to take risks, try new things, particularly later in careers, and I think that is unfortunate because, obviously, if we could take those risks and make more transitions and avoid biases in our decisions, then we would have more fulfillment and better outcomes. I would say that is sort of my biggest takeaway from the conversations we have had on Choiceology that is relevant to this career transition question.

DJ: Hmm. And if I may persist with this for a couple of minutes, you know, you spoke about the recency bias versus focusing on the cumulative earlier when you were talking about judgment and decision-making, and coming to the world of career and skills, and let us say, the world of how markets value people, there is something to be said about cumulative capabilities that you accumulate over a period of time, and back to your point about sunk cost, is there a tension there because there is a temptation to sort of drill deeper and longer in one place for you to become an expert or become a go-to person in a certain domain versus spreading yourself too thin, so is there a tension between that versus exploring new territories you see?

KM: Yeah, that is a really interesting question. I think it is distinct from the issue of sunk costs because that would be, you know, I would not call it a sunk cost to become an expert necessarily to the extent that it has carryover benefits. So I am not sure there is a tension, but I certainly take your point that if there is some trade-off between explore exploit, that is always the case and as you explore more, you learn more, you may have broader expertise, but it is not as deep. And that is

always a trade-off and that is a separate issue from the status quo bias and tendency to escalate commitment, and one that we need to think about too.

DJ: Lovely, makes a lot of sense with you. I think that sort of nuance in language helps, thank you. Let us dive into the book, Katy. Before we talk about the 'meat and potatoes' in the book, you know at a macro level I was curious, there have been quite a few books written around change in habits and behavior shift and so on by people like Charles Duhigg, James Clear, BJ Fogg and so on, can you talk a little bit about what was that delta insight or the difference in angle with which you were approaching this given the body of work that had already happened in the realm of behavior change?

KM: Yeah, thanks for giving me the chance to talk about that and I should say I really admire all of those authors and books that you are referencing from, you know, The Power of Habit by the brilliant journalist Charles Duhigg to, you know, Atomic Habits and Tiny Habits, these are all great books that I do recommend. I think there is a really big difference though between reading a book that is about, you know, so written by a journalist from the perspective of entertaining and delighting with new science to one that is written by a scientist, which is this book with the goal of bringing the latest insights and also an understanding of the methodology and the limitations to the table. So that is one thing I do think the perspective of the writer matters and those other books that you mentioned are not written by researchers or scholars who are in the weeds. So it just gives you a different perspective on things and a bit of a different level of depth in terms of going into the scientific studies. I guess the other thing I would say is that I do have a different perspective. I think, on this topic, first, I am not focused solely on habits, I am focused on a much broader set of tools that we can use to change behavior. So a book like The Power of Habit, I absolutely love but there is really only one chapter in my book that overlaps at all with that where I do touch on habit, but I cover a lot of other material as well. The other difference is that I think my key takeaway from all of my research over the last two decades roughly studying Behavior Change is that we systematically make a mistake when we are trying to tackle it and that mistake is we, and by we, I mean individuals who are trying to make change in their own lives and organizations that are trying to create change in individuals to improve the performance of their employees or their members or their students, the mistake is we say, like, let me look for a strategy that sounds like it might work if I want to make a change and just apply that here. So, you know, ooh, let us use tiny habits as an example, like, those sound really handy, there is some basis in research, I am going to use that and solve my problem and I am going to create change. What I have found is that happens a lot, there is like a reach for a single shiny tool or, you know, let us set big audacious goals and what that misses is that actually, in order to successfully create change, what I have seen time and again is we need to understand what is the obstacle that is preventing change. Is it bad habits, in that case, okay, you are trying to build better ones and disrupt current habits, great, that probably is a good solution. But if it is something else which it often is, then that is actually going to be quite ineffective. So there are all different types of barriers to change from habits, which can be a barrier to a lack of confidence, which can stand in the way of making change to impulsivity. To make this change is not aligned with what is instantly gratifying for me and I tend to elect to do the things that are instantly gratifying more often than the things that are good for me in the long run. Is it that I have not found the motivation just to begin my journey, is there is a forgetfulness problem, I have seen all of these play out as barriers to change often more than one at a time. And each one, there is scientific research showing what we can do to overcome it, but if we just grab a tool at random that sounds good for creating change and do not match it to the problem that is preventing change in a specific situation, we do not get very far. So the real premise of my book is that we need to be more strategic, that we need to match our solutions to the barriers to change, and that when we do that, we can get a lot farther and then, the book is organized around the different barriers, internal barriers, I should say, because of course

there are also external barriers to change. And that would be a totally different book and a really important one too, but I am focused on the internal barriers, that is what I study and know the most about. And each chapter is focused on an internal barrier and all the science that we can use to topple that and mix with stories to make it readable and fun and relatable but ultimately, getting down to scientific studies, what they show works, what the nuance is, and when they sometimes actually can backfire. So you will also appreciate that because I rarely have seen silver bullets. Even when you know what you are up against, there are always boundary conditions. So I try to be really clear about the limitations of each tool as well.

DJ: Hmm. And you talk about tennis, you talk about how Brad Gilbert helped turn Andre Agassi around.

KM: Yes.

DJ: And I love the way you connect the dots. I was more of a Sampras fan to be honest than an Agassi fan.

KM: Oh no, no, do not tell me that.

DJ: But I think the metaphor was fascinating. So I would love for you to just maybe connect the dots for us here.

KM: Yeah, I would love to tell that story. We have been talking sort of a million miles in the sky but getting into some of the stories that make the book hopefully fun to read, not just practically useful is one of my great pleasures. So it was so fun to write this opening story for the book to help make the point about how important it is to match our solution to the obstacle we face. And I should say, I chose the story about Andre Agassi and I did agonize it, this was the last part of the book I wrote and I ripped up many previous drafts with different stories. It was particularly fun because I am a tennis player. In a former life, I was a very serious competitive tennis player as a junior and I played in college, so it was near and dear to my heart. But Agassi, for those listeners who might not be familiar with him, was one of the great tennis players, played in the 1990s, was number one in the world for about a 100 weeks over the course of his career, many Grand Slams to his name. But what is interesting about Agassi is he got off to a really rocky start. There were other rocky periods too actually, he had a lot of bumps, but his start was particularly bumpy. And he was this, sort of, phenom in the United States, everyone expected great things because he had been a junior star and actually, he grew up with other famous tennis players you might know, you mentioned Pete Sampras, they were around the same age, Jim Courier is another name that might be familiar to some people, Michael Chang, so all these players came up as juniors and everyone thought Agassi was the most talented. He looked like he had the most promise and in the early 1990s despite that, these other guys who were winning Grand Slams, were ranked 1 in the world and he was really struggling. He was well known, you know, he had gotten a lot of endorsements because he wore flashy clothes and he, you know...

DJ: You could not miss him on the court, shall we say?

KM: Right, crazy hair, he wore ripped jeans, he wore lipstick to a tournament once, he was certainly flashy, so people knew who he was but he was not doing well. And in the early 1990s, he had a real low point when he was ranked about 30th in the world, his coach of a decade just left him unceremoniously, and he was foundering, was totally unclear how he was going to recover if he was ever going to have much of a career to speak of. And he had this really important dinner arranged by his manager with Brad Gilbert that turned everything around. This is sort of why it is how to change,

and it fits so nicely with the book and the point of changing is this moment. So Brad Gilbert was also a pro player at the time. He had written a best-selling book called *Winning Ugly* that had been a New York Times Best Seller earlier in the year. They sat down and Agassi is asking Brad Gilbert for advice on his game, like how do I turn it around, and, sort of, trying to figure out would he be a good coach for him and Gilbert basically tells Agassi he has been playing the sport wrong his whole life. And he has some credibility in saying this. Gilbert, even though he is not reputed to be naturally talented, had done incredibly well. He would have this really successful career as a pro tennis player, often reaching further in tournaments and anyone thought he had any right to, given his natural ability. He was a strategic player and he basically said to Agassi, look, if I had your talent, I would be number one in the world. You are doing it all wrong, you are going out on the court, you are trying to win every point with these flashy shots because you have so much talent, but you never think about who is on the opposite side of the court and you never strategize and figure out how do I let this person lose some points, how do I work their weaknesses. You are always trying to close and always trying to hit the big shot and you are so good that you have gotten pretty far on that, but if you just played a strategic game, figure it out how to tailor your approach to your opponent, you could be the best. And it was this sort of light bulb moment for Agassi based on, you know, and by the way, I should say Agassi wrote this amazing memoir called *Open*, which is the source material for this story.

DJ: Love it, I love that book.

KM: Ah, so good. I highly recommend it. That is how I learned the story and about this pivotal dinner that changed Agassi's understanding of the game. He took Gilbert on as his coach, started playing completely differently. I mean it took a little while to train that way and he had amazing outcomes. He entered the US Open, which is one of the biggest tournaments of the year, one of four Grand Slams and he was unseeded, meaning, no one thought he was going to perform well, he was not going to come in the top 16 was the expectation. And he actually won the tournament playing his completely different style, forcing his opponents to win, rather than losing himself by trying to go for all these perfect shots. He was extremely strategic and he, eventually actually in that same run, reached number one in the world, a position that he went on to hold for a total of a 100 weeks over his career. And again, there were more ups and downs but that was a real turning point in the way he approached the game and completely changed the level he was able to rise to. And I think the key insight is exactly the insight that so many of us miss when it comes to behavior change. The way he changed his strategy of play was to become strategic. Instead of looking for the one-size-fits-all solution to tennis, he started tailoring. And it is exactly what I have seen works best for individuals and organizations trying to create change. There has to be an acknowledgement of what is the barrier and a strategic tailoring of the solution to that opponent that you are up against. And once that happens, your odds are much better, just as they are in tennis. So that is why I open with that story, that is a metaphor and hope it resonates with listeners.

DJ: Lovely, and as Late Clay Christensen would say, one size fits nobody. Sometimes, you might have..., so point well taken.

KM: Right, and it is funny, in business, we think about strategy a lot. It is a great point. Clay Christensen was a great strategic thinker, but we tend to think about it more at the organizational level. And I think that that very basic insight of how important it is to think about strategy is rarely applied to our personal lives, to our personal decision-making, to solving for change at the individual level. And that is kind of a key point at the heart of the book, is we get it in these other settings, we get it in sports, we get it in organizational strategy but at the individual level, it is just as important.

DJ: And moving along, Katy, I wanted to talk about this notion of fresh start. You talk about your conversation with Prasad Setty at Google where you say that Google offered its employees a wide

range of benefits and programs, designed to make their lives and jobs better and to solve problems like under-saving for retirement, over-use of social media, physical inactivity, and healthy eating and smoking, but the employees were not taking advantage of these schemes. So in that context, you talk about the timing and the power of a fresh start and in the book, you talk about how the fresh start could be applied in different contexts if we are creative about it. So could you talk a little bit about that?

KM: Yeah, absolutely. And thanks for giving me a chance to talk about one of my favorite chapters in the book as well. That meeting was really interesting. So I got to go present my research at Google, as you mentioned, about all these different ways we could nudge behavior change and got this amazing question from Prasad Setty about when was the ideal time. So, sort of, convinced that we should, at Google he said, be doing this nudging people towards more saving and healthier lifestyles and more productivity, but are there ideal times to that, that was the question. And it set me on a new research adventure because I thought it was such a good question and I did not know an answer. I did not believe there was an answer yet from academia, but I felt like we should provide one. It was such an interesting and important question. So I teamed up with my then PhD student, Hengchen Dai and also with Jason Riis who is the CEO of Behavioralize and a former Professor at HBS and at Wharton. And Jason, Hengchen and I started thinking about what we knew already and what we could learn about when the ideal time is to encourage change and when are people most motivated just naturally to change in their own lives. What we found is that there are moments, this would not surprise you at all that feel more like fresh starts to people. And the one that we are all familiar with already is New Years. This is a moment when around the world people are setting resolutions at a higher rate than usual, trying to pursue goals at a higher rate than usual, and it feels like a fresh start. The psychology of New Years actually turns out to be familiar and extends to many other moments, but the psychology of New Years is you can say, sort of, well, that was the old me last year, the old me could not achieve this, you know, the old me tried to quit smoking and failed, but that was a whole different person. The new me in the New Year can do it. And you feel this dissociation from your past failures in this renewed optimism as you open a new chapter in life. What we found is that New Years is actually just one moment that has that new chapter fresh start feeling. There are lots of other moments on the calendar and in life when we also feel we are turning a page and can get that same dissociation from past failures and motivation, and also the likelihood that we might actually step back and think big picture about our lives is greater. So some of those moments include, according to our research, the start of a new week or a new month, the celebration of holidays that feel like fresh starts in our culture, the celebration of birthdays. And, of course, there is other research looking not only at these psychological or temporal markers that give us the sense of a clean slate and a fresh start, but if you physically change environments, that has not only psychological appeal and helps you, but it can literally disrupt routines in a way that is helpful as well. So we have shown people are more likely at these temporal landmarks, we call them our new beginnings, to do things like visit the gym or set goals on popular goal-setting websites online about everything from their finances, to their health, to their education. And if you encourage people to make a change at those moments, a moment that has a label on it, like, hey, you know, want to make a change on the first day of spring or after your next birthday, it turns out that is more attractive, people are more likely to do things like start saving in a retirement account when you invite them to, or just pursue goals beginning at those times when you give them those labels. And if you invite them to save it in an identical moment or change at an identical moment, but do not even point out that it corresponds with the first day of spring or a birthday. So that was a really, I would say, exciting line of research and it points to the power of taking advantage of these moments in our lives. If we want to make a change and encouraging others to make changes and providing with the resources they need to make changes at those moments when we feel like we have a fresh start and are therefore more naturally inclined to change.

DJ: Hmm. And you actually refer to Google creating something called a moments engine and using that to nudge behavior, any nuance there in terms of how the moments engine works?

KM: Yeah, this was really something exciting that I learned about when I called Prasad up after it had been a while since I had made this visit to Google. And I said, hey, Prasad, I am writing this book and thank you again for this amazing conversation, we will spread all this research, which he of course knew about because I had been sharing with him over the years what we had found and I said, has Google done anything or use this in any way, I am curious and he said, yeah, actually, we created this moments engine that we use to nudge employees towards making different decisions or adopting different programs at moments that are appropriate and feel like fresh starts to them. So I thought that was really exciting. I honestly would not have ever learned about it potentially if I had not been writing this book and reaching back out to him to ask what he was up to, how things were going at Google, if they never done anything with that old fresh start research I shared with them based on his question. So it is really exciting to hear they have done that. And I know another organization who Humu, which is a actually a spin-off from Google. It is an HR organization, but they have used machine learning to digitized HR programs and then they help companies manage people more effectively.

DJ: That is the one headed by Laszlo Bock?

KM: You got it. Laszlo was at Google at the time when I was doing this work. I am now an advisor at Humu and Laszlo has told me they also use, in their algorithms, fresh start moments as points in time when they try to nudge certain behavior change. So I know at least two organizations that have used this in their algorithms to try to promote positive change and I hope there will be many more if there are not already.

DJ: Got it. Actually talking about identity, you spoke about how sometimes during these fresh starts we try to think from the lens of a different identity, and I was talking to a gentleman called Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi who is at MIT Center of Ethics, he is actually a monk who teaches Business Ethics at MIT, and when I spoke to him, he said, you know, covid, in a way, is like a timeout given by mother nature to mankind, saying, go figure your stuff out. So I was just wondering, you know, this notion of a fresh start.

KM: It is quite a timeout from mother nature.

DJ: Correct, so I was just wondering covid is a sort of a giant experiment we have seen in terms of a reset for a lot of people. So in that context, have you seen any interesting fresh starts that come top of mind?

KM: Yeah, it is a really interesting question. I do think, you know, applying the word fresh to covid always makes me, because that has a positive connotation and I certainly do not feel if there is any positive about what has happened around the world in the last year and a half. But, just in terms of the temporal landmark component, the fact that we have had a chapter break that was forcing us to step back and think big picture about what our values were, forcing us to experiment with new ways of living and working and think about our values in that respect as well, it fits the psychology of a fresh start, but I feel like it should have a different kind of label.

DJ: Lifequake, you know, one of the...

KM: Yeah, a life disruption, maybe we should have called fresh starts life disruptions.

DJ: It is a good point. See I think maybe if I could frame the question better, there is something agentic about the notion of fresh start. Sometimes, lifequakes happen without you having any control by external circumstances, so is there a nuance there, does it have to be necessarily chosen versus imposed?

KM: Actually, fresh starts typically are imposed. I would say that they are typically, the ones that we have studied have been moments on a calendar that come without, you are going to turn 35 or you are going to turn 55 or 70, you know, God willing, if all goes well without your intentionality. So, right, you know what I mean, it is going to happen. So those things come about without your choice. And so that is the nature of most fresh start moments but when we see them, they have meaning to us because of the way we think about our lives, the way we bracket time and think about our lives as if they are taking place in chapters. So I do think that covid has felt like a chapter break for many of us. And I think all of us are also hoping there will be an end to this chapter and a new beginning after it, that is better, where we have hopefully learned some things from this forced experiment over the last year and a half with different ways of working and living. And the question is what will we do with that. I certainly have heard, I would say, it was, I heard more conversations like this in May and June than I have heard of late in the United States. Obviously, where you are in the world has a big impact on how you are experiencing different months. And what is happening in May, I think everyone in the United States was starting to feel optimistic that we had turned the corner, vaccines were widely available. There was a sense that maybe we would put this behind us, go back to work, go back to normal. I think people are feeling differently now. We have the Delta wave is hitting us in the U.S. right now. Obviously, May was awful in India and so it was a very different moment there. But back in May, when people were feeling optimistic in the United States, I did hear a lot of talk about fresh starts and new beginnings and what were the resolutions people had made about how to live differently and better in the new era, post-covid, a lot of reflection, a lot of people choosing to move to new jobs, this felt like a good point, you know, good moment to do that or move to new communities, maybe they were going to be able to work remotely on a long-term basis, so they could rethink where they wanted to live. So I do think that it was a major fresh start moment and I think we will have more of them because we are going through ebbs and flows on this and everybody is feeling like okay, I see the light at the end of the tunnel or this is a pivot point for me at slightly different times and different places. And it does cause reflection, it does cause, I think, an increase in people's willingness to change. That is my guess based on the data we have from very different fresh start moments in time.

DJ: Hmm. And moving along, Katy, in the book, I also loved your reference to the Mary Poppins song, Spoonful of Sugar makes the medicine go down. We, as a family, are a big fan of Julie Andrews, who is not I guess but we love to...

KM: She is very lovable.

DJ: ...love to sing songs and sound of music as a family. And you say that there are often interesting bundling opportunities that we could consider to get boring task done, could you talk about the insight here, especially, you know, maybe as a parent of an eleven year old and a seven year old? I am curious, you know, how should we think about bundling for ourselves but also in terms of making this relevant for children?

KM: Yeah, no, it is a wonderful question and the reason I talk about Mary Poppins actually is funnily enough given the way you ask that question. I think we do intuitively understand that to get things done with kids, and that is why the song rings so true, you have to make things fun, they would not just do chores because they know it is good for them in the long run like or eat their broccoli because you tell them they will live longer or make their bed because you say like good people are

neat and tidy, there has to be an element of fun. Kids do not understand that delayed gratification, those long-term goals that they are striving towards in a way that at least some adults can. But what is interesting is that research suggests we as adults assume, even though we get this about kids, we assume that we do not have the same challenges that once we set our mind on a big goal that is distant that we should be able to just do it, as Nike would say, and sort of work towards that. And research shows that is actually not right. So there is work by Ayelet Fishbach and Kaitlin Woolley, Ayelet at the University of Chicago, Kaitlin at Cornell, showing that people misunderstand their ability to just push through a difficult task. When they need to get some big goal done, most people will choose the most efficient route to success and only a small subset of people will try to find a way to make the goal pursuit enjoyable in the moment. But people actually will do better and persist longer if they are encouraged to look for a fun way to pursue their goals. So to give you a really concrete example, if you are trying to exercise more regularly, the more effective route might be using the StairMaster to get yourself in shape. But a more fun way would be to go to Zumba classes with a friend and you will persist longer if you actually do it the more fun way. But most people think, I just have a goal, I want to be in shape, let me use the most effective route and then they quit. So we get that, we need to make it fun for kids, we do not appreciate we need to make it fun for ourselves but the same rules apply to adults. We are not very good at delaying gratification, we overweigh the instant experience and under-weigh the long-term benefits. We just do not know that about ourselves, the way we know it about kids. I think this insight is really important to all aspects of behavior change but you mentioned temptation bundling and that is actually a specific tool that I have studied that builds on this insight. It is funny because the research happened in the reverse order. I did the research on temptation bundling and later this work by Kaitlin and Ayelet pulled together the key insight that really is the heart of temptation bundling that we need to make things fun or we would not do them, but temptation bundling is really a technique for that. I have studied it. The basic tool is, if you want to make something more fun or in order to make it more fun and alluring and likely that you will do it and not delay gratification, you link whatever feels like a chore with something instantly gratifying and only let yourself have that instant gratification while you are doing the chore. So in the domain of exercise where I just gave you another example, you could think about, you know, only let yourself binge watch your favorite TV show on Netflix while you are exercising at the gym. That would be a temptation bundle, you have linked something tempting with work, the workout with a chore, so now doing the chore actually is something you look forward to because you want to get that tempting stimulus. Time may fly while you are doing the chore because it is linked with something fun and you would not feel guilt about the indulgence after the fact, like, oh, I should have been doing something more valuable with my time because you only did it while you were accomplishing your goal or getting your chore done. So you could only listen your favorite podcast while doing household chores or making fresh meals, only let yourself have a snack you crave while you are doing your taxes or if you are in school, while you are studying or catching up on emails for work that you might not enjoy, there is all these different ways you can temptation bundle and it converts something that you would normally delay and put off and not persist on into something you actually look forward to and so get done.

DJ: And there actually, as I read your book, I felt there was an interesting nuance around the zero one element of it in the sense, make that sugar, if I may use the term, available just for that time when you are doing the chore and lock it up otherwise.

KM: Yeah, exactly, that is exactly right.

DJ: It is not so much more of it but actually absolutely none of it otherwise, if that makes sense.

KM: That is right, right, exactly. Yeah, I think that is really important because if it is just, you can binge watch your favorite Netflix show any time including at the gym, now it is not a hook, but if you

are only allowed to do it at the gym, now you start craving trips of the gym to find out what happens next. So that is really key, sort of, linking them to each other. So it is an if and only if treat.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here again. The other piece I have learnt about habit formation is that we should never try and fight will-power. We are better off thinking about the environment and ensuring that what we want to do is in the path of least resistance.

James Clear (JC), the Author of Atomic Habits, who was earlier at the podcast, speaks about it here.

JC: *“So, basically you want to make the good habit the path of least resistance. As an example, I have one reader, he would practice guitar and when he would come back from his guitar session, put the guitar in a case and put in the closet and so he just wouldn’t see it for like a week and maybe forget to practice. But so, his new habit became I’ll take my guitar, put it on the stand in the middle of the living room, pass it all the time, it’s right there, it’s very obvious, it’s also frictionless to just pick it up and play for 5 minutes. So, now he practices all the time because it is highly visible. You can also increase the friction of a task. So, for example, if you want to watch less TV you could take the batteries off the remote control so you have to get up to turn it on manually or you could unplug the TV after each use and only plug it back in if you can say the name of the show that you want to watch. So, it’s now you know you can just mindlessly turn on and find something. And those are examples of kind of increasing the friction or reducing the friction associated with a habit and the lower the friction is the more convenient it is, the more likely a habit will be performed and the higher the friction is, the more inconvenient it is, the less likely you are going to fall into that habit.”*

DJ: Do tune into my conversation with James Clear if this is of interest. You can just go to playtopotential.com and find him in the Guests section.

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. Let’s now go back to the conversation with Katy Milkman.

DJ: And you also talk about gamification as an approach. I guess it is a little related to the discussion that we are having but one of the nuances I found interesting was this notion of entering the magic circle, and you actually say that very often organizations come up with these interesting things but not many people enter the magic circle, so it does not really have the impact it is supposed to have. Could you talk a little bit about the context in which use the term magic circle here?

KM: Yeah, absolutely and I should say that this is something I learned about from my Wharton colleague, Ethan Mollick who studied this and sat down to teach me about gamification when I was writing this chapter of the book and knew I needed to learn a lot more. He explained me concept of the magic circle to me and the ideas that in order for any game to work and to be fun, the players

need to enter the magic circle. They need to basically accept the rules of the game, agree to abide by them, sort of, suspend disbelief. So entering the magic circle in Monopoly, for instance, would mean that you are not going to just steal money from the bank, you are going to follow the rules and only use the money you earn to play the game and according to the rules of the game. And it is no fun if you do not enter the magic circle, if you do not, sort of, say okay, I will be bound by the rules, I will play along with the game, you are not going to get any joy out of it. And what he found interestingly is that a lot of organizations try to gamify things that might not be fun for their employees in order to make them more enjoyable but a lot of the time this does not, or at least some of the time, this does not turn out so well. In one study he did, he did a study with my other Wharton colleague Nancy Rothbard where they were trying to give sales people a gamified bit of encouragement to achieve more work to, you know, sell more, and some got a gamification, I will say, overlay on their daily job and others did not. So like all of a sudden, every sales call is scoring a layup and there were graphics to go along with it, and the more you score, more likely you are to earn a bottle of champagne and there is a leaderboard, so it is all part of a game. What they found is this actually did not improve employee performance and it even sometimes seemed to backfire. It worked okay when employees entered the magic circle. So they surveyed employees and stuff like, you know, did you find the game fun, did you understand the rules, did you want to abide by them and so on, people who were into it, they actually saw some benefits, but a lot of people were not into it and they saw some harm generated. So net net, it was not much of a positive because it was imposed from the top and it was not helping people achieve things that they intrinsically wanted to achieve. So they did not enter the magic circle, they did not jump in and say like this is great, this is fun. I think there is a couple of key points, one, if a game is not fun, it is a bit of an art to create one that is, it is not going to do anyone any good and second, if it feels like forced fun or mandated fun from the top down, it is not going to be a way that helps you achieve more. If you are trying to achieve a goal and find a way to make it fun for yourself or choose to use an app that gamifies goal achievement and that resonates with you and you enter the magic circle, it seems like there can be really big benefits because then, the fun resonates. But there is just a lot of boundary conditions. I think like a decade ago, there were a lot of management consultants saying, let us gamify everything and we can get people to be more productive and then, I think, the research just has not borne out that promise for this reason that often people are not bought in and so it does not have the desired effects.

DJ: Hmm. And moving along, I also love the story around Victor Hugo and how he locked up all his clothes and just kept a shawl to complete *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. And in a way, this flies in the face of economics where you would think people prefer more freedom, but your research suggests that people often prefer to handcuff themselves. And you spoke about this even in the way students sometimes, you know, different clusters, how they submit their assignments on time, and you refer to the notion of commitment devices. So can you talk a little bit about the nuance here around why we sometimes choose to handcuff ourselves while we should be preferring more freedom?

KM: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is a really interesting topic and I really enjoy teaching my Wharton students about commitment devices because it is very counterintuitive. We are all used to the idea that maybe a benevolent government might impose some rules on us to try to help us achieve more, that a parent might do the same. And recognizing that, for instance, we might be tempted to speed but there is going to be speed limits that will prevent us from doing that and fine us if we do, so we would not be tempted or as tempted to speed and will understand that there are consequences that might deter us from doing so. So we are really used to that kind of structure from someone else. But what is interesting is that research shows people, sometimes, will impose and benefit from structures like that on themselves, meaning self-imposed penalties for misbehavior. The idea that

people would do this is counterintuitive, it is sort of counter to economic theory, like why would you ever fine yourself for bad behavior and yet, research shows people do find it appealing sometimes to constrain their future behavior in a way that will help ensure they follow through on their long-term goals. This can be particularly important when you know you have some long-term goal, but you might be tempted to deviate from sticking to that path. Like, you know what, you want to get these assignments done and do them well over the course of a semester but if you have no deadlines, they are all due at the end of the term, you may be tempted to procrastinate, put off all the work until the last minute, and then not get it done. So, one study by Klaus Wertenbroch of INSEAD and Dan Ariely of Duke University, they did this really nice experiment showing that students, given the opportunity, they self-impose deadlines for assignments due throughout a class, they will be penalized, meaning if you turn it in late, you will get less credit. A lot of students actually choose equally spaced deadlines, not all, some say, yes, stack them all at the end, I want the most freedom and flexibility possible. But others choose to distribute them more evenly so that they would not procrastinate. And this ability to self-impose deadlines turns out to improve student performance, particularly on the last assignment of the semester when they might have all the work pile up. One of my favorite studies is also a study about cash commitments, which are different kind of commitments, so that is where you can penalize yourself for failures as opposed to setting up structures, like create rules and prevent failure. This study was looking at smoking and it gave smokers the opportunity and one experimental condition to put money on the line that they would forfeit if they failed to quit smoking in the next six months. Now, you might say like, why would anyone put money on the line that they could just otherwise pocket, no matter what but the answers of course to incentivize themselves not to keep smoking because they really do want to quit. So, people could put money in this account and then they know they had to forfeit all the money if they fail on nicotine cotinine test six months later. People who had the ability to do that quit at 30% higher rates than people who just got sort of a standard smoking cessation toolkit. And that is fascinating, it shows us, not everyone, by the way, put money in this account, lots of people did not, but enough did that it generated these benefits. So when we can think of ways that we can basically fine our future selves or constrain our future selves, sometimes that could be valuable if the barrier to goal achievement is that we might give into a temptation, the short run will be sorry, we gave into in the long run.

DJ: And is there a nuance here about private versus public commitments?

KM: It is certainly the case that there is more efficacy in commitments in terms of, you know, are you going to achieve your goals, the bigger the penalty imposed for failure. On the other hand, there is also more penalty incurred if you fail. So there is a little bit of a trade-off there but if the real goal is, I want to change this behavior, the more cost you impose on yourself for failure the better, and a public commitment, it is just an added cost because basically now you are adding shame to the equation. So you can pile money on, like, fine yourself more if you fail to quit smoking but then you can say like, you know, I am going to tell my grandmother and my aunt and the new person I am dating, all these people are going to find out if I fail and then that is extra cost in the form of shame. So public commitments are just one way to up the ante and make it costlier to fail.

DJ: Katy, the other piece I found fascinating in the book is you referred to Max Bazerman, your dissertation advisor and you actually talk about the nuance with which he dealt with the students and you actually link it to another piece of research from Kellogg. Could you talk a little bit about the nuance here about how we should focus on building confidence rather than pointing out mistakes people make?

KM: Yeah, absolutely. Um, I love that you gave me the chance to talk about this. I had the great good fortune to be advised by Max Bazerman as a PhD student. He is an amazing Professor at Harvard

Business School and he is a, sort of, unusually talented advisor. His students have done unusually well in their careers. And I always wondered what that formula was, like, what was his secret, how did he take so many students and generate so much success. So I was really interested in, actually when I started advising my own students as a faculty member at Wharton, what was it that Max did to succeed, that was different that so many other advisors. And what I think I learned from both talking to Max and exploring my own experience and actually reading research is something that I do not think Max appreciated, he did perhaps. So I tell a story of a time when I walked into Max's office after getting a rejection from a journal, which is like the worst thing that can happen to an academic, especially a junior one who is trying to figure out how to publish, it is publish or perish. And this work I had done, I had put my soul into for two years, it came back with reviews from all these people who are experts in my field saying, rejected, it is not worth publishing and I thought the end is near. And Max just gave me, with total confidence, the advice that it was good work, it was going to turn out well, it was going to get into another journal, go revise it for a couple of days, do what I could, and let us send it back out again, and not panic, basically, which of course is great advice. We all appreciate you are not to panic but what I realized is there is something really systematic about the way he handled anxiety, the way he coached his students to succeed, that was really actually different than other advisors. He had this total faith that his students would succeed. He really believed in us in a way that was different than most advisors. And maybe most advisors do believe in their students, but we do not always convey consistently like you are doing great, here is how you are succeeding, here is what you are doing right. And Max had an uncanny ability to do this. It all became clear to me years later when I learned about the research of Lauren Eskreis-Winkler who is now a Professor at the Kellogg School as you alluded to. She had this insight doing her PhD research that more often than not when someone comes to us and they are struggling, our instinct is to give them advice. And of course, an advisor is the person who most often is asked to give advice. So it is sort of funny that I am pairing this with Max. What Lauren wondered is if we maybe have the formula wrong and if instead of always giving advice when people come to us and tell us about their struggles and are not soliciting advice, maybe we should actually do something different to build their confidence, maybe we should turn the script around and we should ask them for advice, put them in the role of mentor and coach and see if that could help them. And she thought it might be effective to turn people who are trying to achieve more into advice givers for a few reasons. One is she thought it would build their confidence and that is the most important reason. Most of the time they are used to being told they do not know what they are talking about, this is why you are failing, let me give you my tips and that just depresses confidence but if we put them on a pedestal and say, I actually think you probably have some insights from struggling with this challenge, maybe you could share them with others who are facing similar challenges and help them, we would say, hey, we believe in you, that you are smart, that you can figure this out, that you already have some things to share and can help other people. So that is going to build their confidence, which often is deflated at this point in a challenge to change. Then a second thing that it might do is help them dredge up insights. So they might not have even bothered to go looking for if they did not have to give advice to someone else. And finally, once they say, oh you should do this, they are going to start believing it. There is something called the saying is believing effect. If you say something to someone else, you do not want to be hypocritical and you start to sort of think that must be true or else why would I have said it, and you do not want to deviate from your own advice. So I link this to Max again because one of the things I realized he did with all of his students is, he put us in the position of advice giver to his more junior students. So there was sort of a group of us and not only did he try to coach us when we asked for solicited advice, he actually very rarely gave unsolicited advice. And often, his first step is to put you in the role of mentoring someone else, so whether it was an undergraduate or a more junior student on a project, so there is a coach opportunity for you as a doctoral student to learn how to be a leader and how to give other people advice. So I think he implemented this in practice and then Lauren's research has proven, in a number of different

situations, just how beneficial it is to be put in the role of advice giver. And one study that I got to collaborate on, we randomly assigned high school students to either give advice on studying and how to study more effectively to their younger peers or just to a control condition where they go by life as usual. And what we found is that being randomly assigned to just spend about 10 minutes writing out bits of advice for other students, here are good places to study, here is how you can avoid the temptations to check your phone constantly and stay focused. Writing out that advice at the beginning of the third quarter of the academic year significantly improved students' grades in the class they most hoped to improve in, as well as in math over and above a control group that just did not do this 10-minute exercise. And we were not turning to see students into valedictorians, it was a small boost in grades, but it was significant and that is a testament to how powerful this tool can be of turning people into an advice giver, rather than constantly just putting arm around them and trying to coach them, once we understand that it builds confidence.

DJ: Got it. And it is so counterintuitive. Typically, when people mess up and come to you for advice, it is very easy or tempting to jump into the position of problem solving and ideas giving but I found this insight powerful and counterintuitive at the same time.

KM: Yeah. No, I really love this insight and I do want to point out it does not say we should not give solicited advice. When I walked into my advisor Max, the great Max Bazerman's office, I solicited advice what do I do about this manuscript. And he was helpful to say we are going to resubmit it. But it is pointing out that sometimes when you give unsolicited advice, it can harm confidence. And just in general when we are coaching and helping people how important it is to keep confidence in mind and how we are through our actions, whether we realize it or not, and every bit of coaching we give them, everything we say to them, it can implicitly convey whether we believe they have got what it takes or not, and it is so important to build people's confidence in order to help them achieve more.

DJ: Got it. And moving to a different theme, Katy, in this podcast earlier, I was speaking with Tom Vanderbilt who has written a book called *Beginners*, where he speaks about how young infants learn to walk. And he actually goes on to say the real meaning of the term baby steps is not just taking small steps, but it is taking steps in different variety of conditions. And babies actually randomize a lot of the movements and try walking in different situations to build a walking habit. And you say something similar in the context of, you know, to use your words, Routine Rachels and Flexible Fernandos, and you actually say that the climate in which we form a habit, there needs to be a certain variation for it to stick. So can you talk a little bit about the nuance here?

KM: Yeah. No, I love that you brought that up too. Um, the age-old wisdom on habits is that you want to repeat the same behavior in a really consistent way, sort of, you need to find a cue, like a time of day or a location, where you always perform this behavior and, as much consistency as you can create around its performance, the better, then you perform the behavior, you reward it and you repeat, and the more often you do that, the stronger routine or a habit you will build. And I did the study that, I thought, would get at that. It was a study where we are trying to build exercise habits, actually among Google employees, about 2,500 of them who wanted to create habits around the start of a new year, fresh start effect. And we either coach them to engage in the behavior, in this case, exercise and we paid them, we rewarded them for it, either in a really consistent way, like, same time of day whenever they did it, or we encouraged more variety in the way that they engaged in that behavior. So over the course of a month, some people basically are coached to go to the gym always at the same time and ended up making about 85% of their workouts at a consistent time that they had planned in advance, let us say, 7 a.m. if, you know, for a person in our example, was there ideal time, 85% of our workouts over the course of this month are at 7 a.m. then. And another group of people also pick their ideal time, but they are encouraged to go whenever they want. And as a result, about half of their gym visits end up being at their ideal time, let us say 7:00 a.m., the other

half are at other times. So the question we were interested in is this month ends, we have helped people train up a habit or we tried to, but whose habit will be stickier. If both groups go at the same rate, will it be the people who were mostly visiting the gym at the same time or people who had more variety in when they did it? We expected actually it would be better to have more consistency that that would build a more consistent habit, but when we analyzed the data, what we found is we were wrong. So, two people, they have gone to the gym in equal frequency for a month but in different patterns. One is going at the same time all the time, the other is going all over the place, you know, at different times. We see the person who has more variety, ends up going more after this month ends. And the reason is really simple, it turns out in our data, the people who had been going really at the same time over and over again, had formed a really rigid routine. So they were actually a little bit more likely to go with their 7 a.m. gym time, the time that was best for them on average at the end of this period. So they had formed a habit around that but if they did not go then, they did not go at all. So something comes up, I miss my 7 a.m. workout, I throw up my hands, I cannot make it, I miss my 7 a.m. workout, that is it. The people who have been more flexible and when they went to the gym, sometimes they went at 7, sometimes went at 5, they go a little bit less at 7 a.m. at their usual time after this month-long habit, building period ends, but if they miss their 7 a.m. workout, they still get to the gym. So they go at noon or they go it 5 and net-net, they actually have built a more robust habit. So this was really surprising to us. What we were expecting is that that consistency would build habit and what we found is it was actually rigidity that we are building and the flexibility proved so important to getting the thing done that you are trying to do on a regular basis and that we need to have flexible habits. So a first best time to go in a back-up plan is what really proved to be important for getting through this particular goal. And I think there is many goals like that. If you think about exercise or meditation or language practice or whatever it is you are trying to do on a regular basis, that if you can build flexibility into a routine, that, net-net, may be a much better way to make sure the thing gets done than a really rigid routine.

DJ: Katy, in the book, you also speak about the example of Ben Franklin who decides to make a fresh start after a phase of debauchery and you say that he made a list of 13 virtues and started tracking himself on those and clearly, we know the transformed Ben Franklin and the body of work he has produced, but what does your research suggest about how much change people should take on? Something I think about as an executive coach when I am working with a leader, the question on my mind is how incremental versus how transformative should the change be.

KM: Well, it is a great question. You know, I do not have specific advice about the incrementalness of the change you are going for overall, but I certainly think it is important to think about goals, not just a big long-term goal but rather to break them down into more bite-sized pieces and there is lots of research showing how important that is to goal achievement starting with work by Al Bandura, the great Stanford psychologist who actually passed away just a few days ago at the time we are recording this, he showed how important it is not just to have that big long-term goal but to break it down sort of what are the component parts, so what is your weekly or daily goal, not just what is your yearly goal because when it feels bite sized and more achievable, you are more likely to see progress, so that is really important. If you have that big goal, also have the sub goal that you are going to be able to achieve and see progress on and make plans for on a more immediate basis. And then, I guess, the other thing I would say about what kind of goals to set is, it is important to start with one and research shows that if we have a goal and we make a plan for how to achieve it, we are more likely to follow through if we are just pursuing one goal and one plan rather than a bunch of things at the same time. When we have too many plans that we are making, this is work led by Stephen Spiller of UCLA, if we have too many plans, we get overwhelmed. So we map out how I am going to get to the gym every day and how I am going to cycle more regularly, how I am going to meditate every day and how I am going to learn a new language and what I will achieve for that each

week and it is just overwhelming. It feels impossible to do all these things. And so, one at a time is the way we want to take on these challenges, which is not to say you cannot be working towards several objectives at once, it is rather that you want to focus on and plan for one at a time. And then once you can put that plan into an autopilot mode and it is working for you, then you can turn to the next goal that you want to achieve and make it your focus and figure out how you will plan and achieve. But that is also a really important thing to keep in mind when we are working towards big overarching goals.

DJ: Got it. And in the book, you refer to Jerry Seinfeld and his insight around streaks, could you talk about the nuance here, the fact that we should not just focus on single data points but focus on a streak?

KM: Yeah and this is a popular anecdote, I should say. I do not think I am the first to use it. It is popular because it is so delightful and useful to keep in mind. The story goes that Jerry Seinfeld tried to write a joke a day and did not want to break the streak, that was his mantra because he saw that momentum and by telling himself, do not break the streak, try to keep the streak going, he could stay motivated to just push through another day and another day and so on. He had that extra motivation. Streaks do seem to be motivating. There is a growing body of research suggesting when we see ourselves in a streak, it feels like a loss, we talked about loss aversion either to deviate from that streak and so we will stay highly motivated to stay on track rather than breaking it. Tracking, by the way, is also another useful thing to achievement. When we track ourselves, we can celebrate our successes, understand what is going wrong more easily and in general, tracking is useful to goal pursuit. So I think those are nice tools that anyone can start using, sort of tracking how you are doing, and trying to think about maintaining streaks to keep yourself motivated to stay on track.

DJ: Got it. Katy, as we wrap up, this podcast as you know is titled Play to Potential and when we wrap up a conversation, I end up asking the guest what does the term mean to you, given all the research you have done, given your journey, what is your point of view on each one of us playing to our full potential?

KM: I love the name of the podcast and I think it is really a nice compliment actually to the key message of the heart of my book, which is about the importance of reaching your potential by understanding what are the obstacles, tailoring the strategies you use to achieve change to whatever obstacles you face, that is how you can reach your true potential and that is how you can achieve so much more than what most of us typically do and do instinctively, which is just reach for the best sounding strategy, instead of the one that is suited to our situation. So that is what it means to me, is optimizing and solution problem matching.

DJ: Lovely, on that note, Katy, pleasure talking to you, thank you so much for making the time.

KM: Thank you so much for having me, this was a real treat.

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 found this conversation of interest, you might like the podcast conversation with BJ Fogg, author of Tiny Habits and the conversation with James Clear, author of Atomic Habits. You can find them in the Guests section at playtopotential.com. You might also like two of the Curated Playlists.

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To know more about what is in the podcast archives and the advisory work I do, you could just visit 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

Nugget from James Clear that is referenced: [Environment and habits](#).

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Habit: Habits are routine behaviours done on a regular basis. They are recurrent and often unconscious patterns of behaviour and are acquired through frequent repetition. Guests on the podcast share their experiences in baking habits in their lives. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Driving Change: Ability to drive change in an organisation is one of the critical Leadership Competencies for a CEO today, given more and more is getting done at the intersection of different ecosystems, and a large portion of value add is not directly under the leader's control but in the wider realm of influence. In this segment, leaders talk about how they drove change through a complex system/organization. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Katy Milkman - Nuggets

- 79.01 Katy Milkman - Agassi and Behaviour change
- 79.02 Katy Milkman - The power of a fresh start
- 79.03 Katy Milkman - Temptation bundling
- 79.04 Katy Milkman - Entering the magic circle
- 79.05 Katy Milkman - Benefits of Commitment Devices
- 79.06 Katy Milkman - Boosting morale instead of Unsolicited advice
- 79.07 Katy Milkman - Building a robust habit
- 79.08 Katy Milkman - One goal at a time

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](#).

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Podcast Transcript [79.00 Katy Milkman – The Full Conversation](#)

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