



Guest

Rajiv Vij is a life and executive coach, author and speaker. He works with senior leaders of several Fortune 500 companies and other large organisations across Asia and India and has been a coach to several industry leaders. He also voluntarily coaches a number of founders and leaders of social-sector organisations.

He is the author of two books, including his latest release, 'Inside-Out Leadership: 16 radical insights successful leaders wish they had discovered sooner'. Prior to finding his calling and starting his coaching practice in 2006, he served as Managing Director, Asia for Franklin Templeton.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 84th 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 transform and 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 playtopotential.com.

As we approach the end of 2021, do look out for end of year Episode where we have handpicked and curated 10 most impactful nuggets from 2021. This includes insights from people as diverse as Tenzin Priyadarshi, a monk at the MIT Centre of Ethics, Ramesh Srinivasan – a Senior Partner at McKinsey, Bruce Feiler – the author of life is in the transitions, Amy Edmondson of Harvard on Psychological Safety and Lloyd Reeb of the Halftime Institute. This episode should be out in about a couple of weeks.

Back to this episode, I am really excited to bring this conversation with Rajiv Vij, an experienced Executive Coach based in Singapore and the author of the recent book – Inside Out Leadership – 16 radical insights successful leaders wished they had discovered sooner. Rajiv doesn't know this but he has been a role model to me as I was making some of my choices from Egon Zehnder to the Coaching and Sounding Board Advisory work I do now. I remember speaking to him at the cusp of launching into my journey and I remember some of his advice very vividly.

While there are a lot of books out there on Leadership, I really liked Rajiv's book because of the nuance with which he unpacks some of the themes. I specifically loved his nuance around how leaders should think about delegation, his insights around mindfulness and being open to possibilities, his insights around multiple levels of listening and the notion of working with the leader as a whole.

Without further ado, let's dive into our conversation with Rajiv Vij.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): DJ: Rajiv, thank you for taking the time for the Play to Potential Podcast. Excited to have you.

Rajiv Vij (RV): No, totally my pleasure, Deepak. I have been looking forward to this conversation.

DJ: Rajiv, congratulations on the recently published book, *Inside-Out Leadership*. How is the book doing?

RV: It is coming along nicely. I am getting lots of positive feedback early days, but it is connecting with leaders, as well as other professionals. And I think they are getting some new and different insights from it. It is a slow read in the sense that people like to read kind of one chapter at a time, there is lots to absorb, there are some exercises at the end of it, so I think people are taking their time. I have not had a lot of feedback yet, but whatever I have had has been very encouraging.

DJ: Lovely, congratulations, Rajiv, and would love to dig into the book in a few minutes but before that, I do talk to people about their journeys and some of the key choices on this podcast, so maybe we start there and then get to the book, if that is okay with you.

RV: Yeah, sure.

DJ: Rewinding the clock, Rajiv, you were in a good wicket in Franklin Templeton a few years back. You grew the assets under management from \$180 million to \$3.6 billion in three years when you took on the role in India. Then you went on to lead the Asia business and grew the AUM fourfold. But then around that time, you quit to pursue a different path. Can you take us back to that passage of play and relive some of the thoughts, emotions and tribulations during those months?

RV: Yeah, thanks, Deepak. I was very fortunate to grow quite rapidly in the organization and at a relatively young age as well, and I do not know if it had to do with that, or just my own inner journey. But somewhere in that process of growth, I started to become acutely aware of a sense of incompleteness within me. That something, despite all this success, something was still missing, and it was hard to articulate exactly what. And I remember telling my wife for the first time about it and she was like, wow, what is wrong with you, you know, like you have got, you know, you look at the typical list of things you want to be accomplishing in life and you tick all the boxes and, you know, what is happening. But it stayed with me, this little disturbance. And around that time, I got involved with some NGOs in my personal capacity, just through some friends and acquaintances. And as I started to spend more time with these individuals, some of the leaders there, it really inspired me very differently. It really got me thinking that this high-flying job that I have, jumping in and out of planes that I am doing every week, what difference does it make, does my existence even matter, will I leave this world any better than what I had inherited. And I guess many of us have these questions at some point in our life on that long flight or on a beach holiday and so on. But come Monday morning and we get sucked into the emails and the calls and so on, and the spark is gone. But for me, it stayed with me really, it really hounded me. And I was also, at that time, reading a lot about, you know, in the space of, sort of, who am I, purpose of my life, social change and all these sorts of existential questions. And as my friends often remind me, I was going through perhaps some

kind of mid-life crisis and perhaps rightly so, but it was getting channelized in a very positive way. I had also learned some meditation techniques, you know, now way back like 25 years ago and found them really effective personally, even professionally, but again with a busy corporate life, these thoughts would fleetingly come and go. And around that time, because I felt torn and conflicted, confused, I revived it, and wherever I was traveling around the world, I would find my time to meditate every single day. Long story short, Deepak, what was coming through to me, was, while work was terribly exciting, but the joy of being involved in two things, one, of working on myself, on my own personal and to some extent, spiritual growth, and secondly, of helping others in some way, at that time, it was through in a very minuscule way, through these NGOs that I was getting involved with, but it gave me a sense of meaning that I could get from helping others. And that started a bit of a hobby horse that this is the life I want to create and that is how I made the switch.

DJ: Hmm. And maybe going back to the switch as you say, Rajiv, you know, when I work with leaders in transition, you often have multiple pathways to choose from, in terms of how you scratch that itch, can you talk a little bit about the different pathways you considered and the one you ended up picking, the one you ended up walking on, as you transitioned from the busy corporate life?

RV: Yeah, once this hobby horse that got into my head, which was all about, I want to create a life which revolves around working on my own personal and spiritual growth and helping others in some way, that was the banner, sort of, the north star that I was working towards. And then there were many ideas cropping in my head. And by the way, this is all happening while I am busy in my corporate role, etc., etc. but I was like, should I introduce new forms of holistic leadership to organization, or should I start an NGO, or get into wellness. There were many ideas coming through, but somewhere in that search, research and ideation, I actually stumbled into the field of coaching. I do not remember exactly the book I read about it or first I saw it on the internet and I got interested, but as I started to learn and read more about it, it just fired my imagination. It was like, wow, this is it, this is what I was meant to do in this lifetime. It is like that deep connect where you have that sense that this is your calling where your whole sense of purpose that you want your life to be about, can get totally aligned to what you want to do professionally. So, it is not like you are trying to live your purpose but in those 10 hours a day, you are not exactly aligned to that. I figured that for me, coaching offered such a wonderful platform. Firstly, it is about helping others, that is the primary objective of what you are trying to do. So, I knew that is what will give me the sense of meaning and so forth, which perhaps, to some extent, I was seeking. And secondly, it is a space where, by the very nature of the work you are doing, you are going to continue to work on yourself because you cannot be coaching others if you are not walking the talk or you are not trying to grow yourself in your thinking and just in a holistic way. So, it just seemed like meant for me kind of thing and then once this idea started getting crystallized, then I could not hold myself back. Then it was not one day, a few more years, I will be financially more secure. You know, kids were young, my kids were 11 and 4 at that time. But the call was so strong in my mind, and I do, you know, I am a left-brain analytical kind of a person but I did not do any analysis. I did not speak to another coach in the world, I did not figure out does it work economically, nothing. It was just like this is what I want to do, and the call was so strong, then I just decided, I still remember talking to my leader in San Francisco saying this is what I want to do and they, of course, took a long time to even reconcile like what is happening, like this sort of fast pace, successful executive, etc. And they in fact offered me a very interesting proposition. They said, why do not you keep your role Monday to Thursday, same comp, same title, everything stays the same, but Friday, Saturday, Sunday for the next 12 months, you are free to try this crazy hobby of yours and see where it goes, I guess somewhere hoping that I will get over this itch. Very tempting obviously, but I thought about it for a while and then I passed it. And I think that was such a wise decision in hindsight because it really, you know, the shift I was trying to make, Deepak, was not a career shift, it was a life shift that I was making. And in that life, I

did not want to create time for maximizing stuff on all fronts and I knew that on a Friday afternoon when Korea office calls with a crisis, I am not going to be able to say, hey, I am on my off time right now, it does not work that way. So, I moved on and yeah, all I can say is this has just been a blessing for me, both professionally and personally, it has just been wonderful.

DJ: That is wonderful, Rajiv. I love the way you frame it, apart from helping others, it is also an opportunity to be on an endless pursuit of working on yourself, which is so incredibly rewarding. If I reflect on the journey with the podcast for example, I tell people, first and foremost, it is an L&D function for me. Even if nobody listens to it, just the privilege of speaking to people like you and learning from some of these conversations is worth the investment and everything else is a bonus on top, so it is wonderful that you frame it that way.

RV: No, I totally agree. I started writing, Deepak, primarily with the objective of saying, okay, I want to reach out to more people because I want to keep my coaching practice limited etc., etc., so how can I help other people benefit from some of these learnings and so on and so forth. But the biggest gainer of my writing, as I have now discovered, is me because writing forces me to crystallize some vague ideas and particularly when I am writing a blog for example, 600-700 words, it forces me to clarify my own mind from all these vague ideas that you have. By and large, you know what you are trying to do or what you want to say, etc. but writing the piece really helps me. So, I have been a big gainer and I am glad you see the podcast journey in the same light as well.

DJ: Hmm. If I may persist with this transition for a couple of minutes, Rajiv, one of the things that comes up when sometimes leaders have to make this dramatic shift from a busy corporate life to a path like the one you have chosen, is the attitude towards money, I find that it is a key part of the equation, what have you learnt whether it is your journey or some of the leaders you have worked with, is there any perspective around how we should think about the economics or the mindset with which we need to approach the economics when we are at these transition points?

RV: Yeah, that is a very pertinent question, Deepak, because it comes up all the time when people are trying to make the shift or considering the shift. I think couple of points here, one is that, particularly for people who are successful, we realize that actually after a point, success does not add to greater happiness, and it is somewhat the same with money. I mean you need, obviously, a certain quality of life, you want to make a living, you want to send your children to right schools, etc., etc. but an unending pursuit of money does not add to our quality of life, whether it is our fulfillment or happiness and so on. So one is that perspective that, you know, we need to recognize how much is enough and there is a broader shift then happened to me naturally during that time, which is the distinction between needs and wants. I always wanted, you know, I was fortunate, as I said, to grow, every two-three year I would get promoted, etc., etc., moving to the bigger house, bigger car and the latest cell phone, whatever, but do I need that, not necessarily. And somewhere deep down to me, that was coming through that bunch of things which I am pursuing, which have become my wants and almost, to some extent, even an addiction, do I need that, do I need the next big house, do I need the next big car, and I figure I do not. And when I look at what I need to be happy, even financially, if not that lot, is not that much. So, recognizing how much do we need in our own personal context and in our family context, firstly that is important. So that automatically, or there is a good chance that is going to reduce your whole financial constraint in the first place. The second thing I have seen with experience is letting go of future financial growth, is actually not that challenging, which means if you are on an upward trajectory financially or in your career, etc., etc. and you are saying, you know what, I am getting off this treadmill and I am willing to give up the future earning potential, that part is okay. What I have seen with lot of clients, etc. as well is, if they are able to exit and, pretty much, maintain the lifestyle they were exiting at, not the future lifestyle, not the potential lifestyle, but the lifestyle they were at the point of exit, if they can maintain that,

then they are generally very happy because now they are pursuing things that are meaningful, they add to meaning and fulfillment and happiness and balance and bunch of other things, so the holistic outcome is actually very healthy. But in case it is a situation where that exit is going to lead to a decline in your quality of life, just from a financial standpoint, then you have to think a little bit more carefully about it because you yourself who is passionate about something, etc. and want to make this call might be okay, but invariably, people also have other people in their ecosystem, there is a spouse, there are kids, etc., and then it becomes a bit of a challenge to be managed because you are disrupting other people's lives as well. You may be okay to sleep on a mattress, but it is not always fair to expect everyone around you to do the same. So those are the two-three perspectives I have seen.

DJ: Very interesting, I love the distinction between solving for, you know, or maintaining the quality of life, if you will, at the point of exit versus forsaking the upside, I like that nuance, Rajiv.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. I am reminded of an earlier conversation at the podcast with Prakash Iyer, who is a fellow alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad, who was last the Country Head of Kimberly Clark Lever. Now he is a speaker, an author and a Coach. He narrates a story about Joseph Heller, the author of the book Catch 22

PI: *"Like a lot of other kids coming out of middle-class India, financial goals were important in the early stages of our lives. Therefore, it was important for you to kind of make enough bread and butter and some jam. Beyond that, I guess, I've been swayed by this guy. There is this interesting story of how Joseph Heller apparently was at this party thrown by an investment banker in New York.*

DJ: *That's the guy who wrote 'Catch-22'?*

PI: *That's right. A friend of his took him along and said, come, it's a great party, and you'll meet all the who's who of the city. It was a great evening, lots of crystal, the finest wine, and as Joseph Heller stood sipping a drink, his friend said, 'Do you realize, our host the investment banker, probably makes more money in a day than you have in a lifetime?' And Joseph Heller said, 'That's probably true, but I have something he will never have.' And the friend says, 'What?' Joseph Heller says, 'Enough!' And that's a story that's kind of stayed with me. In a sense, I think, I've spent the last few years of my life saying, hey, I think, I need to learn to say enough. And the minute you know you have enough, you are sorted. You don't really need to worry about it. Then, you are free to go and do what you want to do."*

DJ: Personally, I have found knowing the Enough point tremendously liberating in pursuing what I enjoy and at the pace at which I enjoy. I also like the distinction Rajiv makes about foregoing future upside versus taking a hit on the current lifestyle. Taking a cut on the current lifestyle does raise the bar quite a bit on how much one needs to align with all the key actors in our life.

The other related point to mention here is that while we speak about Financial Abundance or Scarcity, it is worth thinking about Time Abundance or Scarcity concurrently. One of my earlier guests Ashley Whillans of Harvard Business School speaks about the notion of Time Poverty and says that when we are short on time, we experience a certain unhappiness which is similar to Financial Poverty. She says quite eloquently that we often focus on time value of money but we don't pause to consider the money value of time. Bringing time into the economics might sometimes make the

decision easier and the proposition easier to navigate with the key stakeholders around us. If this is of interest, you might like my conversation with Ashley Whillans.

Let's get back to the conversation with Rajiv Vij.

DJ: Back to your journey as a coach, Rajiv, you say you have been at this for 15 years, I remember speaking to you maybe a decade back or so when I was at Egon Zehnder and I was probably evaluating some of these choices, if you look at your journey post having made that switch to what you do now, would you call out some of the key choices you have made, what you have said no to maybe as well apart from what you have said yes to in the path that you have chosen?

RV: Oh, loads of choices actually. That has been one of my biggest learnings as well that if you want to say yes to a few things, you have to be willing to say no to many things. And part of it I have been fortunate that that sense of purpose and that north star banner that I was talking about, that has been so clear to me that every dilemma and decision gets bounced around against that. So if it is something that is going to support me in my own personal journey of growth, etc., I will explore it, if it is going to allow me to help others in a meaningful way, I will explore that, but to give you a sense, and that is where, I think, you know, and you may have that experience too, Deepak, in your personal journey, as well as with many of your clients is that, when you are trying to do the right thing, the universe does conspire to help you to support you in that journey. So, I had a bunch of choices I made us a start, one was, for example, that I am going to coach people across Asia but I do not wish to travel for work because I did not like traveling for work, and maybe I traveled too much in those days. So, I said I will coach people over the phone, this is even before Zoom and everything else, it is old-fashioned phone. And initially, my clients were a bit skeptical like how will this work, this is such an intimate personal conversation, etc., etc. and how will this work over the phone, but that is how I designed, that is how I am going to create my life, and that worked beautifully well. I also decided that I am going to have coaching for fixed number of hours in a day. So, I do not have a coaching session before 10 in the morning or after 4 in the evening. That is kind of my discipline from day one and it started actually with the premise because 4 o'clock my kids used to come home from school and I wanted to stop then and spend quality time with them, etc., etc., but that has been my discipline for last 15 years and I have worked with clients across Asia, lots in India of course, Europe and U.S. and so on, it always fits into that 10 to 4, because when you are clear, and I am not being tough or rude or things like that to a client, but they appreciate that you are trying to walk the talk yourself. I also wanted to keep my practice tight. You know, with this 10 to 4, obviously, there are only so many clients I can work with, and I have had so many approaches, you know, even friends ask me, listen, you want to help more people, why do not you create an Asia-wide coaching organization, you want to help people, that is your stated objective, so why do not you do that. And I have resisted that simply because I know that my ability to help others is directly proportional to my ability to help myself. And not in a selfish way, but it is like when I meditate and when I am more present, I know I am a better coach. So, I need to create the time to be in the best place I can be. And for that, I recognize that if I created an Asia-wide coaching organization, I will become a managing partner and I will be back to running the organization, and it is not going to be necessarily as. So, in many cases, I have let go of the idea that more is better, it is keeping as pure to your intent as possible. The idea that you earn good karma not from how many people you help but with what intent are you coaching your clients every day. If you can keep that intent clear, then that is a healthier place. So many things like that that I have, of course, you know, opportunities to be on boards of companies, on NGO boards, etc., etc., after the first couple of years, I let go of all of that because I just found that my ability to, even with NGOs for example, so 15% of my coaching hours are reserved for leaders of NGOs. And all of that work, I find, is so rewarding because particularly working with small midsize NGO leaders, the work I do with them and when they work through their

own challenges, etc., etc., it actually trickles down into the entire organization because these are small midsize organizations. So rather than being on the board of that NGO, I feel I am able to contribute more and in a way that it is more fulfilling for me as well, by coaching the founder. So many choices but they have all been, I mean I just feel thankful for sticking to those.

DJ: Very interesting. Rajiv, if it is okay with you, would love to move to the book, Inside-Out Leadership and maybe discuss some of the themes that really struck me as I was reading the book.

RV: Yeah, I will love to dive into that.

DJ: Rajiv, you say that when you work with a leader, you ask the sponsoring organization to allow you to work with the leader as a whole, can you talk a little bit about why you say this and how it impacts the leader that you work with?

RV: Yeah, it is a crucial point for me, Deepak, and I am glad you picked it because I find that at leadership positions, you cannot differentiate between professional effectiveness and personal effectiveness. Who you are fundamentally begins to come through very quickly? I mean it happens at all levels but in leadership positions, you are obviously more visible, you are in the spotlight, so all of these little traits get amplified a lot. So, whether you are insecure or courageous, whether you are aggressive or permissive, whether you are trustworthy or manipulative, and so on. And so, if you want to be a greater leader, you have to be willing to invest on looking within working on your inner self, in fact, almost reforming your inner self because the work you do with your inner self, that eventually reflects in the quality of your external leadership. And this is the fundamental belief based on which I approach. When organizations talk to me about coaching, I always highlight this and say, please allow me to work with the leader as a whole person because their professional success, the leadership success which is what they are eventually after, is very closely intertwined with their personal effectiveness and who they are, so with again all these traits and so forth. So just working with leaders at all levels of their being, you know, in terms of their physical habits, emotional makeup, their mindset, their beliefs, all of that is such a crucial part of how they show up as a leader. And the organizations, they all agree to that and value that. And I think the leaders find that part more than, you know, learning to be more strategic, or grow my business in a certain way, etc., etc., the richness of the conversation comes from almost this whole personal being. And also, not to forget, that this work, then not only translates into their becoming greater leaders, but equally, it affects their personal relationships, it impacts their sense of balance, happiness, fulfillment and so forth. So, they just find themselves in such a better place at the end of this conversation. So that to me is really the pillar of this work.

DJ: Hmm. And to expand on that, Rajiv, when you say that you engage with the leader as a whole, what does that mean, if you could break that down a little bit in terms of the kinds of things you do or the kinds of conversations you have or the reflections that you guide the leader through, could you shine the light on that?

RV: Yeah, so this is quite crucial, Deepak, because it is the work, they do in different aspects of their being which eventually translates into the leadership. And I still remember this client of mine, for example, in Japan, and their regional head had suggested to me that he is a fantastic individual, doing a great job, etc., etc., but one of the real challenges is interpersonal skills. Now if I had approached this person and talked about interpersonal skills, I do not know how that could go. I mean many times leaders can tend to be defensive and so on. But I said, listen, let us see what are your pain points, what is bothering you and life, and let us work through that, knowing fully well that whatever comes up is eventually going to help him become a better leader. As we were talking in the conversation somewhere, this person, we came up with one goal, two goals, we were still sort of

what else, what else, and this issue had not come up at all. And as we were talking, then this individual said that, you know, there is one other thing and I do not think you can help me with that. But I said, like, what is that, and he said, sometimes I feel I am not a good human being. And I said like what makes you say that. He said, no, just conversations with me do not end well. So, we call this goal a better human being. Now at one level, you could argue a goal like that sound such a personal goal, what has that got to do with leadership. But we all can see that working through that whole idea actually helped this leader to enhance on all of those interpersonal and other skills as we went through the journey. Another example, maybe, if I am talking to a leader, let us say the feedback is this leader needs to be more strategic, for example. We are talking and I say, like, what are you struggling with, anything that you wish to change in your life, etc. and they say, I just feel overwhelmed, I am very stressed, and so on and so forth. So, it is okay, so what do you want to work on, maybe life under control, or a calmer me, or something like that which again, if I describe it to you or HR, it will sound like a very personal goal, like calmer me, like okay. But the thing is that the journey to that calmer me or to life under control revolves around learning to be more strategic because one of the reasons I may be stressed or overwhelmed is because I do not delegate enough, I get too involved in the operational details, maybe I do not have enough interests outside of work, and so on so forth. So, there is a bunch of things that may come up, which are solutions to help reduce the threats or feel like life is under control, but actually indirectly, they are all going to help this person become more strategic as well. So that is where I am saying that the leadership effectiveness will anyway happen once leaders can sort out their emotional, mental and other traits that might be holding them back.

DJ: Hmm. And in that context, Rajiv, you speak about three different quotients, IQ, EQ and SQ. I guess a lot of us understand IQ and EQ, intuitively, but I was curious about SQ, you call it the spiritual quotient. Can you expand on what you have in mind when you say that and also, you call it the last bastion of leadership, if you could talk a little bit around why you say that?

RV: Yeah, so the idea of spiritual quotient, not to be confused with anything religious or anywhere, even near that, is really around the whole notion of being a more self-actualized leader where the leader is, so there are three components of this spiritual quotient, one is self-awareness where the leader is highly self-aware and highly self-aware at all levels of their being, at the physical level, understanding their habits, where they are spending time and why, at the emotional level, having a deep understanding of their own varying emotional states, what makes them happy, sad, anxious, excited, etc. and why and how that affects, how they relate with others, at the mental level, having a deeper understanding of their own thoughts and attitudes and perceptions, and most importantly, their beliefs, which are guiding their own life experience, and at the spiritual level as well, having a deeper understanding of who are we at the essence of our being. So that is one, the self-awareness piece, and then, there is the whole piece of purpose which is having clarity of their own life purpose, not just organizational purpose but their life purpose and how those feeds into their professional life and how that eventually connects with what the organization is trying to do. And the third piece is self-responsibility, which is being very mindful of all our thoughts and actions and taking responsibility for those and recognizing that whatever thoughts and actions we have, how they impact the entire ecosystem. I mean, one of the big learnings of COVID is also, or a reminder, not even, is the interdependence, everything is connected in this world. And so, when leaders take decisions which are useful for the well-being of their team members or the team members' families or they take decisions which have impact on climate change and so on and so forth, just being very thoughtful and taking responsibility of all those actions and decisions, which are impacting the entire ecosystem. So, in summary, the whole idea of the spiritual quotient is someone who is highly evolved as a leader and so, you know, the thing is that why I say the last bastion is because IQ, the intelligence is obviously crucial and the belief used to be that this person should be the leader. EQ

was the idea that you need to be emotionally attuned to yourself and to others because only then you will be able to inspire other people to greater results. But the point is, like, I think where we are on the planet in terms of leadership and what is expected and what is required, the old ideas of management and leadership are not meeting the needs of society in its fullest extent, and that is where you need leaders who are holistic, who are self-aware, are purposeful, take personal responsibility, etc. because that is what is going to be so solely required if we want to move to a better world.

DJ: Hmm. And staying with that, Rajiv, if one had to work on their spiritual quotient, how would you suggest that we embark on this journey of upping our spiritual quotient along those three or four dimensions that you called out?

RV: Yeah, I would say, I mean it is a lot of hard work and it is a consistent effort, it is it is a lifetime project, let us put it that way. Having said that, one of the first things that leaders can do which I would say that most of us in today's society and even some of the good leaders do not end up doing enough of and that is to create a structured and regular reflective practice, where we create moments of solitude on a daily basis, where we cut ourselves away from the noise of the social media and Netflix and the cell phone and so on and so forth and create moments where we can start to look within, where we can start to connect with our inner self and become a self-observer because that is when we can begin to see our own recurring emotional mental pattern, many of which are quite futile but are still guiding our everyday life. And we can begin the work of reforming them eventually, but the first big part is just becoming self-aware. And that deeper self-awareness is also going to eventually lead to greater self-responsibility. It will also show us clarity about our life purpose, etc., etc., but it all begins with this thing of creating time for reflection, so that is the crucial bit, would be a place to start.

DJ: Hmm. Moving to a related theme, journaling is one thing that you talk about, and you make an interesting point in the book, you say that while journaling, we should not be judging ourselves or thoughts or feelings. What exactly do you mean by that and what is the nuance here?

RV: Yeah, great point. I am glad you picked this nuance here; it is a little sort of tricky space. So here is the thing. I mean there are various techniques to reflect, meditation, journaling, positive affirmations, visualization, bunch of different ideas, but when we look at journaling, and it is quite true for meditation as well, but let us stick on journaling, the idea is that what we need to develop when we talk of developing self-awareness, we need to develop non-judgmental self-awareness and why I say that? So, for example, you recognize, you know, let us say you are journaling and you are recognizing routinely that you are, you know, lately you have been very irritable or lately, you have been feeling a bit down or lately, you have been a bit envious, whatever that feeling maybe, so that is a feeling that we want to become aware of. But what is your natural tendency though, you know, we all tend to judge ourselves, and I will come back to the point, we judge ourselves because there is a sense of incompleteness, inadequacy within us. And we are constantly trying to fill that void and that is why we are judging, are we on track, are we not on track and so forth, and it is that judgmental nature which forces us automatically to judge others as well, which we do all the time, including our loved ones, our kids and so forth. And that makes things worse. So, when we are talking about journaling or meditation and non-judgmental awareness, the idea is, so let us say you recognize that envy and the sadness and the irritability. If we judge it and we say, oh, you know, why do I feel like that, what is wrong with me, I am not a good person, how could I be envious or I am, you know, I talk about being a coach, how could I be feeling sad, I thought I was in the business of happiness, etc., etc., what do you think is going to happen to you? Do you think you are going to feel better or worse? Clearly, you are going to feel worse. So, what you are doing is, you know, it is like your child, Deepak, who walks in and says, you know, hypothetically, oh, I am in middle school and

you know, these two kids in my class, they are such bullies and they are so rude and you know kids do not like me and all that kind of stuff. Now, what are you going to do? You want to reassure your child, you want to sit them down and say no, it is okay, it is totally fine, you know, kids are kids and they do different things but you are a wonderful person and you are so good in so many ways and so on and so forth. But when we are thinking that, oh, I have been sad, we are not reassuring ourselves, we are actually making it worse. It is like telling the child that, oh, yeah, how could you do that, how could people not like you, what is wrong with you. That is just making it worse. So, the starting point of all meditation and journaling and things like that is to create a non-judgmental space because that is what is going to create greater self-acceptance, greater self-love, and all of that is actually automatically going to heal us from that void of the sense of inadequacy and incompleteness because we start to then accept ourselves for who we are. And it is okay, and that does not also mean, Deepak, because the other typical challenge there is, oh, if I am being like that and everything is fine then will I become complacent. And it is not that, we all have the drive to get better and we will keep getting better, but it is just that often times, we are trying to get better from a place of inadequacy, that only if I get better, will I be complete. And my point is, no, you are already whole complete and enough the way you are and where you are right now at this very instant, every single human being, and we want to get better. So that is the reason why this non-judgmental self-awareness is crucial because the judgmental part is the thinking mind which makes things worse. If we can subdue that, then slowly, we become aware, yeah, I have been sad last few days and that is okay, that sadness is going to pass. It will pass like every feeling. The excitement and the joy will also pass and so will the sadness and the irritability, both will pass, if we do not engage with it. If we engage with it, it will grow. Did I answer your question?

DJ: Makes a lot of sense, Rajiv. I was just processing it. You know, one of the people I spoke to other podcast was a lady called Tasha Eurich who has done a lot of work around this notion of self-awareness, on the internal and the external self-awareness in terms of how others see us, and she actually says, you know, while journaling, she suggests that we use the What question rather than the Why question. She says the What keeps us grounded on the facts, you know, what happened. The Why often takes us to a place of judgment, I am just connecting it with what you just said. But it is interesting that you also link it to this notion of adequacy, and growth from a place of contentment and adequacy rather than a place of fear and insecurity and inadequacy, that is an interesting nuance.

RV: Yeah, the thing is that no amount of self-improvement is going to help unless we develop self-acceptance. Because you will improve but as you know and I know from our lives and our constant pursuit of growth, is that you climb the next hill and then before you settle down, you are looking at the next one, we can always keep growing, in whatever field. Maybe earlier, we were trying to do it in a corporate ladder and financial and other ways, now, it may be the ladder of self-growth, but still, we can get caught up in the same vicious cycle that it is never enough.

DJ: That is an interesting paradigm because if I link it back to a term that was used when I was in McKinsey, you know, there was this phrase, insecure overachievers to a lot of the consultants, and what you are actually saying is, let us decouple the two, insecurity is not a prerequisite for achievement of growth, it is actually maybe counterproductive to the other side.

RV: Yeah, exactly. Because then we follow what we deeply, you know, what our heart and soul desire. So, we are able to express ourselves more fully when we are in that state.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. Something similar came up in my conversation with Tasha Eurich (TE), a leading Self Awareness Researcher who has written the book *Insight*. She has spoken to 100s of people on their Self-awareness practices. She speaks about the risk of us falling down the rabbit hole of rumination and discusses it here.

TE: *"I knew that we would find that the more people introspected the better off they be and that was the opposite of what our data showed so we found that people who self-reflected often were more anxious, more stressed, more depressed, less satisfied with their jobs and their relationship there were even less in control of their lives and we are just thinking maybe self-awareness is bad may be delusion is actually what we wanted to be fostering because it doesn't seem like it make sense and as we started to dig into some of the data we started to discover that thankfully it's not that the introspection in into a self is bad it's just that the way most of us introspect is completely wrong and the best way to illustrate this you know it gone without having two hours to delve into it is to think about probably what the common introspective question is for most people which is the question "Why". So we might be trying to understand why we are in a bad mood you know you could say why am I so upset after that conversation with my co-worker or we might be trying to understand a bad outcome you know like why didn't I get that promotion or we might be even trying to understand why be believe what we believe you know why do I want that promotion but as it turns out those questions not only the do lead us away from true insight about ourselves they give us a false sense of confidence about our knowledge so for example Sigmund Freud was wrong he believed in his work that people could access their unconscious right so like really why am I upset if I just excavate if I just think long and hard and ask that why question I can find the answer. But what has research has shown for decades actually is that no matter how hard we try we can't access so many of those things it's what I mentioned earlier about the behaviour and emotion and knowledge blindness. So, what happens is we find an answer that feels true even its wrong so that an example of where I can lead us away from the truth rather than towards it. Another reason why a really dangerous question is introspectively is it has been shown over and over and over to depress us you know you think about like why I didn't get that promotion. If you are not careful you can start asking question where the answers are well because I'm just a fundamentally bad person and who would want to promote me and you can kind of get stuck in I call it the rabbit hole of rumination and so what we wanted to do in our study was understand if why is the wrong question what is the write question you know what are these unicorns doing differently than the rest of us and it took us a little while to find this pattern but we discovered that when unicorns introspected they almost never asked why question they asked what questions and at first sight I thought ohh that just a weird sort of fluke or weird nuance but as we started to look into it started to make a huge amount of sense. So, one example would be you are going back to the question why I didn't get that promotion unicorns if they were in that situation wouldn't ask themselves that question. Here is some question they might have asked instead. What did I learnt that can help me be better positioned in the future? Or what can I do to close the gap between you know where I thought I was and where I need to be? Or what support can I enlist from the people around me to help me you know to achieve this goal the next time I set it? Or they are going back to why am I so upset about that conversation with my co-worker they might instead ask what part of that situation did I own or what can I do differently in the future to avoid that kind of conversation with that person and so what we found was asking "What" instead of "Why" really helps us avoid so many of the pit falls of introspection where we you know what excavating for the truth that we are never gone find and we are focusing on our problem and feeling victimized and disempowered. So, I think what I have loved about that is a really tangible tool that I think we can take away it seems subtle but the difference is huge and I am speaking from personal experience. I have started to use that as well."*

DJ: Back to what Rajiv Vij says, focusing on the What ensures that we stay focused on the facts rather than getting too judgmental and going down the rabbit hole of rumination.

Let's now get back to Rajiv Vij.

DJ: Changing tracks, Rajiv, you also talk about delegation, and I liked one of the things you say where you say that, I quote, *'leaders who are exceptional at delegation do not just delegate what they cannot do, they do only those things that no one else can,'* can you bring this to life for us with an anecdote or two?

RV: Yeah, the basic premise here, Deepak, is that typically, for leaders or any executive, when work flows to them, like, whether it is a new idea, new strategy, new innovation, product, technology, whatever, the tendency is that okay, let me grapple with it, let me see how we can do it and then I will divvy it up to some of my team members, etc., etc. And invariably, the tendency is to jump into the work and, when you sooner or later realize that you cannot do everything, then you start delegating it to others. So, if it is like what that is what I say that you delegate what you cannot do, not from a capability point of view, but literally from a bandwidth point of view because you can, hopefully most leaders can do what their team members are doing quite well as well except for some very specialist skill. But the smart leaders that I have seen, what they do, is that anything that they are starting or coming to them or external, internal, their instinct is, who in my team can do this, who is best suited for this idea, that there is innovation, technology, external networking, talking to the government, whatever the thing maybe, their instinct is to engage someone else. And only if there is something that nobody in their team can do because it is something either so crucial or, you know, only their presence is required etc., etc., will they get involved with. And that is the whole sort of the paradigm that good leaders delegate what they cannot do which is in terms of time, but the great leaders do only that which nobody else in their team can do. So, as a result, what it does is it does two things, one is, it is hugely empowering for team members, and equally, it actually creates the space, the time and bandwidth for the leaders to engage with the most important things because the other paradigm is that managers do things right. As we grow in our careers, we get so obsessed with this being Mr./Ms. Reliable and that creates this all perfectionism, etc., etc. which is a great trait when you are junior or middle management. But when you get to leadership position, that actually is dilutive and so, managers do things right but leaders do the right things as in they focus on the most important. So, when they delegate so aggressively, so ruthlessly, that is when they create the time for engaging with the most important. So that is what leads to huge effectiveness. So, their thing is again just to bring some more detail into it. Let us say, it is like every time people get called for a meeting and you try and attend that meeting and we know in corporate life, maybe a third of meetings, we are thinking, hey, why am I here, like, did we really need this meeting. But this leader is going to start by saying, do we need this meeting. If the answer is, yes, do I need to attend this meeting, maybe I will send somebody else from my team, why do I have to, what is so crucial, just because protocol, no, that is not good enough, will I add value or can my deputy add equal values, if he or she can do it, then let them attend. If the answer to that is now, yes, you still need to attend because it is really important for you, then the question is, do I need to attend it now, as and when the meeting is being called or if I am busy, can I push it away. So, it is in the light of both empowerment and aggressively protecting their time, that great leaders follow this kind of a principal.

DJ: Hmm. And moving to a different theme, Rajiv, I also like the way you break down executive presence, it is often a very nebulous term and people do not flesh it out, but you talk about four elements, gravitas, credibility, quality of communication and appearance. Can you talk a little bit

about what these terms mean, especially gravitas, which often ends up being a term that is often used but people do not exactly say what they mean when they say gravitas?

RV: I know, a lot of people get this feedback but then, it is so fuzzy and like what exactly they want me to do. I would put it this way, I think two-three key features of each of these words. I would say gravitas is really firstly around being calm, emotionally in a calm place within, being assertive, so you are neither aggressive, nor permissive, you are assertive, being very thoughtful and most importantly, being secure within, so being in a place where you are really comfortable with yourself, comfortable in your skin. Because the more you are in that place, more you are in that state, the more your presence is going to grow. Just that sense of security draws people into you. So that is on gravitas. Credibility I would say, I mean the starting point is of course authenticity, I mean if you are not authentic, nobody is going to trust or believe you. So authenticity is important, being direct is important because when we are not direct, even though we may be trying to massage the message and so forth, but actually how we get experience by others, is as we are manipulative, even though that is not our intention, you know, we are only trying to, sometimes, we have to give a tough message and we are trying to soften it, but the other person is, because if we are direct, they get it, you know, being direct actually makes the assumption that you are talking to an emotionally and mentally balanced adult, that is the assumption. The moment we believe that, oh, this person may get hurt, he or she is very sensitive, etc., etc., we are already diluting what we are thinking about them, and then we are trying to say things in a massaged way and which is what then loses the directness and the credibility. And of course, openness as well, again, being very open and again, not whether it is hiding facts or just even hiding our emotions. I mean leaders, as we all know, we have grown up in with that is, many a times would hide their emotions. I mean, putting a certain brave face was believed to be so crucial. It is now that everyone is beginning to appreciate the whole mental well-being and how leaders themselves, besides employees, are carrying so many of these insecurities and so on and so forth and it is affecting them emotionally, and just being open and sharing about it, willing to be vulnerable, that is what makes you credible, and that is what creates trust. Communication, I mean a lot can be said on that but very specifically, I would say there are two-three things, one is being direct again, and besides that, two things, one is being able to tailor-make your comments to the audience, and which requires being perceptive. So, people with high executive presence are very perceptive, they can read the room very well, and which is why then they can tailor-make their comments to suit the audience. And again, not in a manipulative way so that it lands well, it connects with the audience. And the other piece of communication is accent, very brevity is, I would say, quite important thing if you want to build that presence as well. And appearance, of course, it is not about being the sharpest looking person in the room, but really about looking and dressing appropriately to the occasion so you are not aligned in any way to the environment. So, I would say those are some of the pieces which can help people build presence.

DJ: Hmm. And of the various things you said, Rajiv, if I were to ask you to expand on one word, authenticity, what does that word mean to you?

RV: I would say, it is being true to yourself in your expression. So, one is being true to yourself within in how you are feeling in yourself, and the other is how you are expressing yourself. So how you are going to be experienced by others as a result of that, so being true to who you are, that is what I would say.

DJ: Rajiv, moving on, you talk about three levels of listening which I have found interesting. You speak about level one being what the person is saying, level two being how the other person is feeling, and level three being how you are feeling. Can you expand on this? I found, you know, once again, you laying it out in a structure, very helpful, how does one build the muscle to listen across all these levels?

RV: Yeah, so just to clarify the three levels, one is what you are saying. So let us say you made a hurtful comment, so that is what I am hearing, so that is one level of listening. I am only reacting to or picking up only what you are saying. The other is I am empathetically listening and understanding, you know, you have made a hurtful comment, where is it coming from, oh, you must be feeling frustrated about that issue or maybe you are feeling let down. So now, I am being really empathetic in trying to engage, in my mind, on the feelings that you are experiencing, which are leading you to say what you are saying, so that is the next level. The final level which is pretty hard, but quite powerful, is understanding what is going on within me. So, when you made a hurtful comment and now, I am saying, oh, you know, maybe you got hurt about something, maybe I let you down in some way or something, what is going on within me, maybe I am feeling frustrated, maybe I am feeling angry or maybe I am feeling regretful and so on. And connecting with all these levels is so important because that raises the quality of the conversation. Firstly, it is going to alter my response. If I reacted to what you are, you say something hurtful, I react to it, we know where that conversation is going to go. If I am little more empathetic and I understand where it is coming from, I will respond in a little better manner. Hopefully, I am kind of appreciative of where you are, what is happening, etc., etc., but I am still not mindful of my own limitations here, which is that when somebody says something that seems sensitive, I, very easily, get into a very permissive mode because I like being kind to people. So again, it is the communication and the interaction is not going to be most transformational or most effective because okay, I picked up your emotional cues but my own emotional flaws or my own emotional triggers are still at play. So, if I can become aware that, hey, I know I am getting drawn into this emotional drama because that is my tendency, if I am just aware of that, maybe I will respond differently and hence, we will move forward on the conversation in a very calm, assertive, authentic, meaningful way and it will become a transformational conversation. So that is kind of the three layers of listening that I have noticed. And again, in my coaching work, of course, this is so crucial because not only do I need to connect with my clients on what is happening with them but also, what is happening inside me. Because again, in a holistic way, Deepak, what is this conversation, what is the purpose of that conversation, on any conversation? Part of it is to move forward on what somebody else needs, etc., etc. but part of it is our own growth collectively. As you said, from this podcast you grow because you pick up some new nuggets or whatever, but as much as I am giving interview or whatever, I am learning, I am growing myself, but only if I am attuned to what is happening inside me. That is my journey of self-growth, which is happening in any process, in any conversation. So again, going back to your question of how does one do it, it goes back to, you know, I might sound like a broken record, Deepak, but it has to begin with deepening that self-awareness and doing it through creating that reflective practice. There, we become more attuned to what is happening inside us at all times.

DJ: Hmm. One of the people I spoke at the podcast, a lady called Jennifer Garvey Berger, she actually also talks about listening to our body for cues as well. You know, sometimes listening, we limit it to the world of grammar and English and language, but sometimes, there are a lot of cues that we can get through our body in terms of how we feel, you know, our wrist clenching, is our back stiffening and so on, which I thought was quite profound in the way we listen to ourselves. Any nuance there, Rajiv, in terms of listening to ourselves, anything that you have sort of gleaned through the years of this practice?

RV: The point is certainly valid. We can definitely pick it up in our physical sense as well. And physical sense is not just yet, one is the body, the other is the impact of the emotions in the body, I mean whether it is stiffening of the back or, you know, that sort of sinking feeling, in your stomach, if you are feeling nervous or something like that or sometimes a punch in the gut if somebody said something that you really were extremely uncomfortable with, and all of these just being attuned to that, I think the other thing is, as I said, just the meditative nature is to be mindful all the time and as

we build that practice of mindfulness, we will naturally be just more aware. It just happens, it is like the radio, you tune it to a certain frequency and that is the music you are going to hear, and you tune it to a different frequency, you start hearing a different music. So, with mindfulness meditation practice, you will alter the frequency at which you are listening. It will just happen. It is not a conscious thing and so forth, it will just happen. You will just be, in everyday moment, just more aware of what is happening inside you at different points in time.

DJ: That is a wonderful metaphor. I guess one needs to be a minimum certain age to relate to that metaphor of tuning a radio, that is so powerful, with you. And if I may stretch the matter further, there is a little bit of noise that you need to deal with as you move from one station to another, but the pursuit is worth it.

RV: Good one. Yeah, you will eventually get there, yeah.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is Deepak Jayaraman here. I love the nuance here in what Rajiv says. Very often we hear a lot of people talk about focusing on the emotion of the sender but being aware of our emotions as we receive these signals significantly impacts the way we show up in a conversation, I guess.

In the conversation, I refer to a piece of insight from Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB). Here is Jennifer speaking about listening to the signals from our bodies.

JGB: *"I mean there is this way that many of us have been taught over centuries in our cultures and our societies that the mind is the great thing and the body is the source of temptation or misleading data. And so, we have learned to not trust or believe what our body tells us and really think that it is the mind that is the most glorious human achievement. Actually, when we look at our psycho-biology, our body is giving us signals all the time that our mind is making sense out very, very quickly and often reacting to without noticing that it was an embodied sensation that we are reacting to. So if we give someone some studies that are greater, like if you give somebody a shot of adrenaline and then you have them meet a stranger, depending on the gender of that stranger they are either likely to be more drawn to that person as a love interest or more threatened by that person as a possible threat or enemy after this shot of adrenaline than they were under normal circumstances and they tend to attribute that to the other person, and they don't attribute that to their bodies in anyway. And so, their body is giving them a signal and then they are acting out of that signal without ever noticing that the signal happened. This is very dangerous that we are responding to data by taking action in a way that is completely divorced from our seeing of the data in the first place. So, we need to get much more in touch with what our body is telling us. I see leaders all the time and you see their studies about this as well. People who go into meetings hungry because leaders I work with are very busy and they hate all the ideas, like they hate all the ideas on the table, none of the ideas are quite right. Well, is this about the quality of the ideas or is this about the fact that you didn't have time for lunch? Like we don't tend to think oh, my goodness, I hate these ideas because I have no blood sugar and I have no creativity left. But actually, this is the way our bodies work. There are fabulous studies of the thing that makes you most likely to get parole when you are in front of a parole board in prison is how close to a break the judges are when they look at your case. If you are right after they ate lunch or breakfast then you are very likely to get paroled, if you are right before it's time for a break or a meal you are very unlikely to get paroled. And this has nothing to do with the merits of these cases. This is completely because the judges are responding to a bodily sensation, but they don't know that they are responding to a bodily sensation, so they think they are responding logically. If we are more in touch with our bodies, we can avoid those mistakes."*

DJ: If this topic is of interest, you might like the Curated Playlist on Listening at the Podcast. If you find the podcast of value, do take a moment to rate and review the show on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. It will help us raise the bar in terms of the quality of conversations we are able to have at the podcast.

Let's now get back to the conversation with Rajiv Vij.

DJ: Let me move to a different theme, Rajiv, transitioning from focusing on doing to being, can you bring that to life for us? In the book, you give a couple of examples on what that means, even in the case of delegation, you actually outline what a doing approach might be like and what a being approach could look like. Can you expand on that here?

RV: Yeah, sure. I think again, really powerful point here, Deepak, which is, firstly, let me just give you a sense of what this whole idea is, and particularly for your listeners, is one subconscious belief that drives our life and we are not even aware of it consciously, is the belief of doing having it being. And what I mean by that is once I can do X, I will have Y and I will be in a state of Z. Example, once I can work hard and get promoted, I will have more time, money and flexibility and I will be happier, how many of us have thought like that? The reality is, it is a mirage because no sooner than you get promoted, you are busier than ever before, and, in fact, now, you are not necessarily as happy because you are already looking at the next promotion that you want, and we are in this vicious circle. And also, we put our happiness, which is what we really wanted in the first place, on hold till such time we get this promotion, and that promotion is not in our control by the way or at least, not fully in our control. So, we are postponing our state of being, which is what we deeply desired and getting busy with the doing. And the way to change that up and to rebalance it in our life is to start from place of B which is to say, what kind of a person do I want to be or I want to be happy, let us say, for a minute, and then amplifying that, making sure we are paying attention to that in whatever we are doing. It is okay, you work hard and wish to get promoted, do that, but all along, do not put your happiness on hold, make sure you are happy doing what you are doing, make sure you are prioritizing things that make you happy even in the work that you are doing in the office and so forth. So, applying that principle to many aspects of our professional and personal lives. So, for example, you brought about the point about delegation, so now typically what happens is, let us say I have become more aware that I should delegate more and I should be more empowering, but again, the busy life, typically what happens is we say, oh, this is such a busy phase, this is such an important project, once I can get through it, I am going to start empowering my team more, that is a typical thought process, once let me do this, then I will be that way. As against that, if only we could take a little break from that and say, you know what, what if I start being empowering now in this busy phase, this important project, etc., etc. that I am getting so attached to, so worked up about, if only I can start empowering now, actually, I will not even be that busy in this project. So, we are starting from the place of being. So, it is we can apply to anything, like people say, oh, one of the feedback items I get is that I need to be more strategic, etc., etc. and again, the same thing. This is such an operationally heavy project and I need to really get into the weeds of it, this is crucial, once this is done, I am going to start learning to step back and start being strategic. If only I can start building the muscle and start being more strategic now when I have this crucial project, this would be the best place to be strategic, in fact, because it is such an important project, so you want to be strategic about it and so forth. So, one of the things I tell people is, walk into the office, sometimes throw your things to do list and replace it with the things to be list. You decide the kind of person, the kind of leader you want to be, and try it for a week or two. And every day say, what kind of a person or a leader I want to be and try being that way, and you will be surprised how the doing will take care of itself. So, for example, if you were to tell yourself, you know what, I am going to be just more mindful as a leader, or I am going to be more courageous, or I am going to be more

empowering, I am going to be more strategic, or even in our personal life, I am going to be more loving to my family, rather than saying I want to spend more time with my children, because you may spend more time, but if you are getting upset with them every 20 minutes, I do not know how good that quality of time was. If you say I am going to be more loving and more encouraging, more reassuring or whatever is your need, then you spend even 10 minutes instead of those 45 minutes, but they were loving moments, they will be better spent than simply just the doing part.

DJ: Hmm, so powerful, Rajiv, thanks for sharing. Moving on, you talk about mindfulness, and you actually say it consists of two key tenets, one is, being fully aware in the present and staying open to possibilities, and I found it interesting because there is a lot of literature around being present, but it was interesting to hear you talk about staying open to all possibilities. Can you say more around what you have in mind here?

RV: Yeah, again, you are very insightful in picking these little variations of the standard things that I have. Yeah, so mindfulness is all about being present and so forth, but one of the things that is a source of stress and also a distraction from our ability to be mindful is that we get attached to outcomes. So, oh, I need to get promoted this year, or we have to move to a new house this year, or COVID must end in the next four months, whatever it may be, we all have little outcomes that we are trying to accomplish but we get attached to them. And because we get attached to them, it becomes hard to be present and hard to be mindful because our mind is somewhere else. As against that, if fundamentally, not only do we learn to engage with the present but also fundamentally, we become open to possibilities, of all possibilities, in any situation, our ability to be more mindful will go up. So, for example, if I were to be open to the possibility that, yeah, I like to get promoted this year but maybe it will happen this year, maybe not, I do not know, and it is okay. We want to move to a new house this summer but hopefully it will happen but if not, that is okay too. And in this very moment, wherever I am, if I am open to the possibility, and the possibilities here are on the positive side as well by the way, Deepak, it is not like, oh, I am resigning to saying this, no, both ways, so, whatever, I am playing golf and I had two terrible holes. Now what is our mind telling us, one, we are not being present because we are thinking about the two holes we messed up, but also, our mind is caught up in the fear of the fact that our score is going to be bad today because we are not going to be able to make up those two bad holes. But if we stay open to possibilities, how do we know the next 7 holes or next 16 holes are not going to play out of my mind today, how do we know that? We do not know, let us just stay present, let us just stay open to possibilities and engage with the current moment in a mindful way, and let things unfold, let us not assume anything. So not being caught up with predetermined notions, etc., etc. and staying open to possibilities relaxes us emotionally and mentally, and that helps us be more mindful in a given moment.

DJ: Hmm. At some level, it is also linked to this notion of agility, just being agile every moment in terms of how the world opens up in front of us.

RV: Yes, it is the adaptability, I mean just being adaptable to that and for that, we need to let go of our preconceived notions about stuff, about people, about situations, about ourselves, about outcomes, and simply engage, just know the prospects. If we stay open to possibilities, if we engage with anything in a mindful way, we are going to get the result that that situation needed to create. It may be different from what I wanted, but it will be still a good effort towards whatever needs to transpire.

DJ: And, Rajiv, zooming out of the book and back to your journey as a coach over the last 15 plus years, one of the things I am beginning to realize, I am still early in my journey, it is five odd years, but I realize that if I look at the situations where I feel I have made a difference, it is often more to do with the attitude of the coachee, and what the person I am working with, the mindset that he or

she brings to the relationship, if you were to talk a little bit about some of the coachees that stood out for you, without getting into the specifics obviously, but, what have you seen about people deriving value from the relationship and what about them stands out for you?

RV: Yeah, firstly, the key to me of any healthy coaching relationship is, number one is the commitment to the process. And by commitment, I do not even mean that they have to be super excited about the coaching journey and they could be positively inclined, even marginally, that is okay, but they are committed to giving it a real shot and commitment not only in the physical time space but also in the sense of mental bandwidth because for us, to embrace change, change is difficult for any of us, and for us to embrace change, we have to step out of our comfort zone, and that requires little bit of mental emotional energy and we have to have that in that moment. If we are just doing it while we are running around, it is like you do not want to be trying to change the tire of a running car, it is just way too hard. So, they have to be willing to slow down, create the time and space for this, so that is number one. The second thing I would say is the comfort with candid sharing. I mean goes without saying, obviously, as a coach, you can only work with people with what they bring to the table and the conversation is only as rich as what is out there. So, commitment and comfort with sharing are the two things. I would say, besides that from a personality point of view, I have now had the privilege of working with people with very diverse personalities, some more like me and some completely unlike me. And there was also sometimes comfort in working with people who are a little bit more like me. It is kind of, you can relate to them faster, empathy etc. comes easily, but people who are completely different, but that is my own personal journey, to be able to understand, to stay in that non-judgmental space and explore what is it that will help this person, does not matter what their personality make up, what will help this person move towards their goals. And in fact, sometimes, I may have grown more as a person, as a coach, working with people who are very dissimilar to me because it has forced me to get out of my own comfort zone and explore and search in my own mind of questions that are going to help move this person forward. So those are some of the things I would say that I have seen people who are very open, very comfortable with sharing, very committed, and yeah, those are the people who seem to benefit the most.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is Deepak Jayaraman here. If there is one thing I have learnt over the last few years, I feel “Houston, I have a problem” works better than “Houston, he or she has a problem”. I have found that there have been several instances where the investor comes to me and says, this Entrepreneur needs a coach. Or the Company comes to me and says this leader needs a coach. Unless, the leader is willing open up and work on some of the themes, I realize that there is not much value for me to add.

I had the opportunity to speak to Marshall Goldsmith (MG), a legend in the field of Coaching and here is what he said about Client selection.

MG: *“The client I coach that I spent the least amount of time with improves the most; the client I spend the most amount of time with didn’t improve at all. So, I made a chart. On one dimension time spent with Coach Marshall Goldsmith and the other dimension is called improvement. There seem to be a clear negative correlation between spending time with me and getting better and I thought that this is kind of a humbling chart. I go and talk to my client who I spend the least amount of time with who had improved the most, Alan Mulally. Alan was CEO here in the United States. Unbelievable, probably the best leader in the world in the last 20 years, at least corporate leader. So, I said Alan, of all the people I coached, you improved the most, I spent the least amount of time with you. I showed*

Alan my chart. I said, Alan, how this chart looks, you never met me, you have really been good. So, I said Alan, what should I learn about coaching? He said Marshall you got one challenge customer selection. You pick the right customer, you always win, pick the wrong customer, you are never going to win. And he said don't make coaching about yourself and your own ego and how smart you think you are, think about the great people you work with and how proud you are of them and he said the CFO in my job wouldn't act different, I don't design cars or build cars or sell cars. I meet great people and every day I tell myself leadership is not about me, it's about them."

DJ: I think it is a healthy reminder for all of us coaches out there. It is not about me; it is about them!

Let's get back to the conversation with Rajiv Vij.

DJ: And a related question here, Rajiv, I have been on this journey for five years, as I said, and it is reasonably lonely pursuit in the sense I do not belong to a large firm, where there is an opportunity of getting feedback, how have you thought about your journey, your development, your growth as you have gone through this journey of coaching?

RV: Yeah, great question actually, excellent question, Deepak, yeah. So, for me, the biggest anchor, if you like, is that meditative practice, that is my anchor. So, wherever I am, if I can get back to that, center myself, etc., etc., it just starts to show me patterns of what is happening. And it could be anything, it could be, I am not being at my best with this client, or I was not fully present, or I am feeling a little nervous before this presentation, whatever it may be, all those things start to come to light and then slowly, I can keep working on those. And also, that reflective space and the practice slows down my own train of thoughts, and that allows me to also see in what way I am being a good coach or less so. The other thing that I have found helpful is attending training programs, of late, not that many, but again, maybe five years, I attended many programs on coaching and then after that, maybe once every two-three years, I do, in fact, recently, I attended a program about six months ago and it was so refreshing to suddenly be back in a classroom, so to say, even though on Zoom and with people from different backgrounds and sparring and so many new ideas and so many things you refresh and learn and relearn and all of that. And the other thing I have found useful was, I do not know if you are involved with the ICF, the International Coach Federation, but they have a whole accreditation system. And that, you know, initially, I felt like it is fine, I will do my bit and as my coaching practice was actually taking off quite nicely, I was becoming a little complacent about it to say, you know, things are fine, clients are finding it so useful, I mean what else do you want. But then, in fact I was talking to another coach, I mean it is funny actually because to renew my coaching credential, I had to do 10 hours of mentoring, and I was talking to this mentor and she said that, why are you just renewing your credential, you seem to be coaching at a higher level, why do not you aspire for a higher level of credential. And I said, no, it is an effort, etc., etc., and she said, no, but, you know, and anyways, long story short, so I pursued that and I learned so much through that process of going through the credentialing approach because again, it just forces you to get back to basics and, you know, we all develop not only blind spots but also bad habits. It is like, you know, I know you play tennis, so over a period of time, even if you have a good serve, we pick up some little bad habit, something we start doing differently or wrongly or could be better and you go to a coach and you could improve on it and same thing I found from this credentialing approach was, just tweaking a few things, correcting a few things, etc. and yeah, it was a great learning experience, and it worked out well as well.

DJ: Lovely. Rajiv, this podcast is titled Play to Potential. One question that I ask all the guests is what that phrase means to them.

RV: Hmm, interesting, yeah. Firstly, I want to compliment you, Deepak, on the quality of your podcasts, I mean you are doing a wonderful work with it, and most importantly, it is impacting so many lives and helping so many people, so hats off to you to put in the energy on such a voluntary basis towards this and to persevere with this passion of yours. So, it says a lot about who you are and what you value in life, so my heartiest congratulations on that.

DJ: Thank you.

RV: Play to Potential, for me, the typical dichotomy that I have seen in myself or with clients or other leaders and people is, particularly in the professional life, is people get caught up with the idea of exploring professional potential. It is all about, you know, I want to do this because what if I have the potential to generate this business, what if I have the potential to run whole of Asia, what if I have, so there is all of that. It is very focused on professional potential and there is nothing wrong with that by itself, however, where it gets in the way is, we confuse that with our life potential, with our human potential, what is this human life about and what is possible in human life, what is even the purpose of human life, and in that, is simply pursuing professional potential and professional success the only thing that matters or is there something bigger and larger than that? You know, what about as we were talking about, our own, this work on self-realization, on self-actualization, the work on becoming more self-aware, the work on deepening the quality of unconditional love we have for others, at the least with our family members. We say we want to love them unconditionally, but do we love our family members unconditionally. And how do we value the progress on that versus growing my business 2x, like who has decided what is more important, or whether we have the gumption and the courage to pursue our life purpose, what is the value attached to that, or our spiritual growth, or self-responsibility, or contribution to society, or climate change, or whatever it may be. So, to me, the whole thing is, if we could only step back and simply determine what is the human life about and what is possible and what, I mean again, I may be sounding a bit more spiritual here, what did we choose to take birth on this planet for, what is it that we wanted to really explore about ourselves, what are the things we needed to learn in this lifetime to grow as that eternal soul. So those are the questions that come to my mind when you talk of Play to Potential, and looking at our own selves in multiple dimensions and multiple pieces or aspects of our being.

DJ: Hmm, so powerful, Rajiv. And if I may stick with it for a couple of minutes, one thing I notice is that when it comes to unlocking professional potential, there is often very visible metrics and we often get into this mode of managing what we measure, and when it comes to some of the other elements of life, it is quite intangible and often not very easy to measure. So, what is your advice to people on ensuring that the measurability does not come in the way of focusing on what matters?

RV: Yeah, again great point. Yeah, we do, I mean, particularly achievement-oriented people do gravitate to aspects of our life where progress is very measurable, professional success easily being one of the top things there or even money or house or whatever. The thing is that, so besides the measurability, the other aspect of this is the external and internal yardsticks. So again, when we do not have internal yardsticks, when we do not know ourselves very well, see, unless we have a deep awareness of ourselves, we easily fall prey to what is popular around us, whatever the society is telling us is important. So, if we have deep self-awareness and we have clarity of our own purpose of what we think life should be about and what do I want my life to be about, and as long as I have my yardsticks on that, firstly, if you are internally focused on what is deeply important to you, I would say do not even worry about measurement. It is like, how shall I say, you know, I find direction is more important than distance. So the example of golf, you know, as an amateur when you start golf, and I am an amateur too, when you start golf, you get so excited when you can hit that driver 200 meters or whatever, it is just a thrill you get, and then you get caught up in how far am I hitting this driver, or in tennis, how fast am I hitting that serve and so forth, but the fact is that as an amateur,

as much as you are focused on that distance on trying to drive that ball further, you do at least one third of the time, if not more, end up in some hazard in the sand bunker or water or some trees or something else. As you become little more experienced about it, you realize that actually the most fulfilling part of golf is to learn to be mindful, to be present, to open possibilities, etc., etc., and for whatever it is worth, the score at the end of the day comes not from hitting the ball harder or further, it comes from hitting the ball straighter. If you can be on the fairway all along, you are just going to have a better score. It is as simple as that. So, direction is, and as in golf so in life, direction is more important than distance. So, if we are attuned to our inner being, are deeply self-aware of who we are, what we want our life to be about and follow our own life purpose and commit to it, etc., etc., the distance will not matter at all, it is just going to be so fulfilling already. And then if you want to put some markers, put holistic markers across all dimensions of your life, whatever you value, whether it is the love in your family, to the deep friendships you have, to how you want to give back to society, to your own spiritual growth, to your emotional well-being, I mean most of these things are very difficult to measure, but you can put your own personal score card if you like. And you can review it from time to time. But as I said, the most important thing beyond the measure is are you following your life's purpose. If you are doing that, you are already in a very significant minority on the planet.

DJ: Rajiv, really powerful conversation. Thank you so much for taking the time and sharing your insights. Thanks a lot.

RV: No, my pleasure entirely, Deepak. I loved the conversation and again, you are doing a great job and please keep that going and it was a real pleasure and I really enjoyed your powerful and insightful questions.

DJ: Thank you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

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

Do look out for our Highlights from 2021 where we will feature the 10 most impactful nuggets from across the various conversations, we had in 2021. We will be publishing this in the next couple of weeks.

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

End of transcription

Nugget from Prakash Iyer that is referenced: [Shifting your goal post over time](#).

Nugget from Tasha Eurich that is referenced: [Limitations of introspection](#).

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [Actively listening to your body](#).

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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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