



Guest

Ravi Venkatesan has been on the podcast about 5 years back. In that conversation we spoke about his journey and his transition from Cummins to Microsoft to Board Roles. In this conversation, we dive into his recently published book - What the Heck Do I Do with My Life.

Some of the topics we cover include the notion of a punctuated equilibrium and the implication on how we adapt, being intentional about life, cultivating an abundance mindset (irrespective of how much we have), different forms of capital that we can work with, specialisation versus generalisation (do you want to be a bird or a frog) and what we can learn from the phenomenon of stotting in the animal kingdom (and the link with personal branding).

Context to the nugget conversation

Hello Listeners, Welcome to the 87th 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 leaders in their respective fields 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.

Now to the guest of this podcast. It is Ravi Venkatesan. I have had the opportunity to know Ravi over the last few years. He was one of the first few guests at this podcast. I had spoken to him about some of his Corporate transitions including from Cummins to Microsoft and to some of the Board roles. We then interacted during my work with Social Venture Partners, a non-profit that I am associated with that works with several organizations and engages people like me to lend different forms of capital to non-profits. He was the person that started it in India. I reconnected with him in the context of his recent book – What the heck do I do with my life? His first book Conquering the Chaos was targeted as Leaders of MNCs in India on how they can navigate the vagaries of the Indian market. This recent book has a very different target audience. It is anyone who is on a career journey. On one hand, It has insights for people who are straight out of college. On the other, It has insights for leaders who have had a successful career and are thinking what next. And to all the people in the middle in that wide spectrum.

I specifically liked 3 things in our conversation. 1st was the notion of Punctuated Equilibrium and the impact it has on us. 2nd is the phenomenon of Stotting that we observe in the animal kingdom and how it impacts how we think about projecting ourselves. 3rd is the point around being intentional about life. You will find several thoughts here that will clarify your perspectives and hopefully get you to ask better questions in your respective lives.

Without further ado, let us listen and learn from Ravi Venkatesan.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Lovely. Ravi, great to have you back at the Play to Potential podcast, excited to be speaking to you in the context of your newly launched book.

Ravi Venkatesan EP2 (RV): Hey, thanks and thrilled to be back. It has been quite a few years since we were formally in conversation.

DJ: Correct, I think I will give you a sense of the context and the journey we have... over the last five-plus years we have had about 85-plus speakers and I think you were speaker number eight in that journey. So, good to have you back.

RV: And congratulations on the traction you have had with Play to Potential. It has just become so popular and so discussed and so aspirational so well done.

Ravi, let's dive into the book, What the heck do I do with my life. You say that this book has been in the pipeline for 10-plus years. So, give us a sense of the evolution of this book and maybe how you ended up with this title.

RV: Yeah, well I described that journey in the preface to my book, but essentially as you know at Microsoft where I was from 2004 to 2011, we used to do these large employee gatherings typically once or twice a year and I would talk about the business and what we need to accomplish, but then I would always end up spending about 15-20 minutes reflecting on larger questions of life, career and so forth. And that would always resonate quite well, much more than the business chat that I would give, the homily I would give, and as I left the company and over the years, I found that a lot of what I said and those experiences stuck with Microsoft's and that's what they would fondly remember and miss. So, I said, oh, this is great. So, I should continue to find forums and avenues to do it. And I remember in 2013, early 2013, I wrote a series of articles on sort of the challenge of making such a transition and I reflected on the central challenge being one of identity. So, if you are not sort of a journalist, you are not a CEO, you are not an entrepreneur whatever then who are you? And that series of articles in Economic Times did exceptionally well with over a million readers and people would come up to me in an airplane and say, hey, are you Ravi Venkatesan who wrote that article and I would say, yeah, So, keep writing, really liked that. And so, I got encouraged and then I continued; LinkedIn was becoming more prominent so I continued writing and posting on LinkedIn and these, while I wrote about many things, those other things would get 5,000-10,000 views and these would do 50,000 and in one case 3 million views. So, I said, look, the subject is something that is close to everybody's heart. And then by 2015, I had decided there is probably a book out here. So, the book as a project, as a concept, is about five years in the making, and the original title was something else. But by 2017-18, when I decided to formally look for a publisher, they said, okay, you need a title. So, I said, working title is, What the F do I do with my life? And then as we were coming close to the end where it had to go to print, we said what do we do with the title? Well, we said it actually seems to be quite a good title except we will change one word and that's how it started.

DJ: Understood, understood. Before we get into the book Ravi, one of the questions I am curious about in the work I do and in the podcast is how people think about their pie chart of time and attention and if we sort of go back to that point where you moved away from your full-time role at

Microsoft to today, can you talk a little bit about some of the key choices you have made along the way, specifically, I think, even in the book you call out a couple of things you said no to but I am curious about how you have thought about choices in that span.

RV: So, when I was leaving Microsoft and one of the choices, I made at that time is not to immediately plunge into one more thing just like this. I had very little idea of what I wanted to do. There was some sort of thoughts, but nothing really fleshed out. And the only thing I was clear and determined not to do was to become an employee again with a full-time job and all that goes with it, pluses and minuses. I remember talking to Nandan Nilekani at that time who has been a friend and mentor over the years and he said the fundamental choice you have to make is whether you want to do one thing or you want to do multiple things. So, okay. I said, but look right now I want to try many things, because and I write about that in the book, which is when you come to a fork in the road and you don't know what to do, then it is very important to try micro experiments, lots of little things and then see what fits and that's what I began in 2011-12. And so, I would say that when I looked back, the pie chart of my time back then looked like quite a few corporate boards. So, Infosys and then there was Volvo, and Bank of Baroda and those sorts of things and that took up probably 70 percent of my time. I began my experiments in the social sector starting with Social Venture Partners, and then with a friend Will Poole we started Unitus Ventures. So, those kinds of experiments. I joined the board of Rockefeller in 2014. So, I would say those things took about 10-15 percent of my time and then my previous book and then the writing effort was the balance. Now, by 2018 is when I think I made the next big pivot when I said, look, the social sector stuff you can't really hope to make any difference unless you are all in, you are really committed. So, I made the big shift to dial down the corporate engagement and dial up the commitment to the dev sector. And so, today the pie chart of my activities is probably about 70 percent development and social sector, about 20 percent is right now with the book project and the corporate engagement is very, very small largely with Hitachi.

DJ: Hmm. And back to your advice from Nandan who has also been on the podcast in the past, the one big thing versus portfolio given your lived experience and the conversations you have with leaders who are going through this transition after having accomplished a lot of things in life, any guiding principles on what kinds of people are better off with a one big thing and what kinds of people are better off going down the portfolio are out?

RV: It is an interesting question. I think as you correctly have surmised, there is no right answer. It is, you know, what fits. But I do think that as you get older so as you cross late 40s, 50, I think it is a little constraining for most people to just do one thing. After 50, even though we are living longer lives Deepak, there is a lot of uncertainty and so you need to start optimising for the thing that is most precious which is time. And so, if you approach this saying look, I have now a much more finite amount of time left and how do I want to spend it, how do I want to optimise it so that when I look back, I won't have regrets, I doubt you would choose to do just one thing. So, I would say the answer is very different when you are in your 20s and 30s where you still have that drive to achieve the achievement orientation and achievement is very much correlated with focus and intensity and so forth. So, the second mountain if you will I think is generally better supported by having a portfolio of things that engage you. That's my sort of surmise anyway, and I also think that there is a certain joy that comes with being more in control of your time. So, the fact is today I am not feeling very productive, I am not going to write, I am going to do something else. I am going to read or I am going to take off somewhere or whatever. Or today is Sunday, but I am feeling very, very productive so I am actually going to just do whatever I need to do. This freedom and flexibility I think is ultimately where you want to be rather on a treadmill where somebody else has the hand on the control, and so that also suggests that you are better off with an array of things.

DJ: It is a great point. I guess it is a, it is also about autonomy and control and independence at some level as we age. Lovely. Let's dive into the book, Ravi. The one term that caught my attention which I haven't really come across in any other piece of work on transitions is this notion of punctuated equilibrium. Can you say more about what it is? And I think, as I was reflecting on it, the question in my head was how do we know there is an equilibrium on the other side given what we are going through. So, I would be curious to maybe if you could just lay out what the term means and talk a little bit about how you see it?

RV: Yeah, look, there is a dinosaur on the cover of the book and people often say what is that dinosaur doing up there and that goes back to this question of punctuated equilibrium. So, this is a term from natural history and when you look at the sort of fossil record essentially what you see is occasional periods of extreme change, which are often correlated with mass extinctions and then things get stable again for a while and then again, another period of extreme change. So, that's why it is called punctuated equilibrium. Generally, there are long stable periods and then there is some shock some event and when this event happens, then a lot of sorts of life struggles to adapt and they become either marginalised or become extinct like the dinosaur and then some other life forms which are able to adapt flourish and become more dominant. And going back to that same extinction during the Jurassic, the mammals became dominant. And so, I say, look, that's a pretty good metaphor for what's going on right now. We have had about nearly 100 years of relative stability, certainly 75-80 years of relative stability and a rising tide of prosperity in many parts of the world and now we are in a period of sudden and extreme change. And in the book, I say that the world will change more in this century than all of human history and that's really the effect of compounding. And this extreme change is driven by so many different forces, the planet reacting to our misbehaviour, the crumbling planet climate change and all that and how we have to adapt to that, there is technology and the way it is driving profound, profound change, there is also very, very new ideas about everything about what is success, how we should organise ourselves, the ideas about whether India should remain a secular country or not and so all over the world there is ferment. And so, this is a period of extraordinary change and most people are not designed or equipped to handle such change, which is why today if you look around there is a lot of anxiety, there is a lot of bewilderment, there is mental health issues, depression, Covid is a superb example of punctuated equilibrium as a sudden shock which affects every human in the planet. And we are going to have many, many more of these types of events. So, the whole central thesis of the book is the title of Chapter I, Adapt or Perish, Adapt and Flourish. So, if you can adapt, there is probably no better time to be alive because there is just so much opportunity, so many possibilities and all that, but at the same time if you are unable to adapt, you are saying why is this happening, why can't we just go back to the good old days, why can't somebody rescue me and fix these things then the chances are it is not going to be too good.

DJ: Hmm, and diving into one of the concepts you discuss in the book, Ravi, you refer to Charles Handy and you talk about the three kinds of roles that he says will exist in the future: creatives, caregivers and custodians. I like the framing as these three, can you say more about how you see these and the implication for individuals to pick a pathway as we go through our journeys?

RV: Yeah, I am a big fan of Charles Handy over the decades. It is just a lot of both vision and wisdom in his work. And so, when I read this, I said, aha, these fits, it is exactly what I have been experiencing and noticing except I have not articulated quite as well. So, yeah, I see, I do think that the vast majority of what we call work will fit into one of these three categories. So, you can think about creation as all forms of creation. So, people who are writing software, people who are creating content of different sorts, people who are building businesses, people who are inventing, that's the creative and I think there is going to be a flourishing of creative work of all sorts. Then you have frontline workers, who are what he calls caregivers and they are all sorts. So, this is the sanitation

workers, this is the nurse on the frontline and the teachers and so on and so forth. And despite automation, I don't think there is going to be a substitute for that human touch that human interface, so there will be a lot of frontline workers. And then you do need to organise in some fashion. So, I don't think companies in the way we recognise or organisations are going to go away and you need a set of people to manage infrastructure processes and so on and so forth. So, there will always be what we broadly call the category of managers, but that number is going to be sort of smaller and probably smaller over time. And so, not only will work largely fall in these three buckets and therefore it is useful for you to reflect on which are my most likely, what are my best two. But also, more and more all of us will just be independent freelancers. Not everybody is going to be an entrepreneur but very few of us are going to be in long-term stable employment contracts. So, that's going to be another feature of this future of work. And finally, there is going to be sort of I suspect greater and greater inequality. So, for instance, if you are a superb creator and there is a lot of value people see in your creativity then the chances are you are going to be able to monetise that exceptionally well and be fabulously wealthy. On the other hand, if you are mediocre then you are essentially not going to do too well in any of these categories. So, unlike in our generation where there was a large middle for people who were moderately okay, I think we are going to see more binary outcomes going forward. So, being excellent is I think really important regardless of which of these categories you fit into. I am sorry for giving such a long-winded response.

DJ: No, no, no, it is a great point. I think this came up in a different conversation as well. I was talking to a photographer, a gentleman named Atul Kasbekar in the conversation as well and he said, same thing, the sort of the one who's at the top of the pole will get the contracts or the assignments, but the next in line, there is just so much supply that you just get crowded out and commoditised in that space.

RV: Yeah, like they said, who was the second man to set foot on the moon. There is a vast difference between 1 and 2 and then an even vaster gap between 2 and everyone else. So, and yeah, it is not fair, it doesn't feel sort of morally just but that's just the way it is.

DJ: Hmm, and the way I, you know, the way I think about that Ravi, therefore, the onus is higher on picking something where you will naturally drive yourself to become excellent, right?

RV: Yeah. So, in fact, I was talking to a young audience and one of them said, look, I really need your advice, I am mediocre at everything, not good at studies, I am not good at, I don't have any exceptional, so what do I do? And I think the answer out of mediocrity is to follow your passion and curiosity which I write a lot about and not live your life by somebody else's expectations of what you should be doing and so on and so forth but have the courage to sort of figure out what you are best suited for in terms of what you enjoy, what you are good at and more likely to be excellent rather than mediocre, more likely to be successful and sustain that over the years if you follow that path.

DJ: It's so true. I think the way sometimes I think about it is we all face the two questions where to go and how to grow at different points in time. I just feel that from a weightage perspective, the where to go question has become a lot-lot more critical to solve today than it was maybe 30 years back, you know, because the stakes are so high.

RV: Hence, the book.

DJ: Lovely. I think the other phrase that you use a lot in our conversations Ravi and also in the book is about being intentional about our lives. Can you say more about what that term means to you?

RV: Yeah, So, I think a lot of people, or people I know friends, family colleagues just sort of drift through life, okay? They are like a piece of wood carried along by a stream. Now, when that stream was sort of a gentle one as it has been for some decades that you can probably get away with, but when that stream is a very, very fast-moving one with lots of currents and waterfalls and this sort of thing then the chances of you ending up in some bad places are quite high. So, I say, look, you can't afford to sleepwalk through life, you can't afford to just drift through life, and I think it is imperative right now given the amount of change to be more aware, more thoughtful, more intentional about a whole set of issues. So, for instance, what do I want to do with my life is certainly one that you should be more thoughtful about rather than just grimly hanging on to something that pays the bills. That won't last. How do I want to measure success? Now, that's a question that everybody on this podcast probably has thought about or they wouldn't be here, but for a lot of other people they are living life implicitly by its success criteria set by somebody else. Now, who do I spend time with and time is precious and as I write quoting somebody else, the sum total of the five people you spend most time with. So, if they are going to be so influential in your thoughts, beliefs, and what happens, then you better choose wisely. Where do you get your information from, who do you trust in a world filled with polarising figures and fake news and false information, I think, it is incredibly important that you think about this rather than just believe every WhatsApp that comes your way and every form of demagogue or streaming on TV or whatever. Yeah, so, I say it is even more important to go under the surface and examine your beliefs what you believe to be true and untrue. These things have happened over time without you recognising, it is like malware that has attached itself to your mind and you need to go back and sort of test whether these beliefs are in fact true or should you change them? What do you pay attention to in your question? So, paying attention to what you pay attention to is important because... so, I just make the case that I think at this moment in time it is very, very consequential to be slightly more intentional about these issues. And in fact, the main purpose of writing this book is to provoke people to think and become more intentional. I don't mind if people say look this is rubbish, I disagree with that, that doesn't apply to me. Sure, that's all fine, but I am thrilled that you are at least thinking about it, okay?

DJ: Very true. It reminds me of a conversation I had with a client, at the outside I walked up to him and said why, why me? He said, till recently I wasn't even aware that where to go was a problem to be solved, you know, and to your point, I think you are right, I think just bringing the problem to people's consciousness itself is a feat.

RV: Yeah, and no matter what choices they make, they will make slightly better choices down the road and things will be discernibly better.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. When we are on some of these long journeys, sometimes we don't quite appreciate the Frog in the Boiling Water syndrome playing out. The context around us shifts really slowly and we don't even see it and fast forward 10 years and we end up finding ourselves in a funny place. I am reminded of an advice I got when I was at McKinsey. One of the Senior Partners would say that you should always choose to continue in the Firm every 2 years. He would say that it's a free market and you should speak to your contacts and see what other opportunities exist and choose to pursue a path in the firm. Given there is so much dynamism in the world outside and in the journey within the firm, there is a great opportunity to refresh the thinking and decision rather than just hurtling forward by default.

The other thing that struck me was the point Ravi makes about Attention and Meta Attention. I had an opportunity to speak with Rich Fernandez (RF) (CEO of Search Inside Yourself, a Leadership Development programme incubated in Google). He speaks about this here.

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

DJ: Back to what Ravi says, what we pay attention to, influences what we end up doing, what we end up doing ends up building our habits and these habits and behaviours end up shaping our lives.

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Let's get back to the conversation with Ravi.

DJ: The other piece you talk about a lot is mindsets, Ravi. I think in the book you referred to Gandhiji just to focus on goals and possibilities rather than resources and constraints. I was curious, I come from a middle-class family, my father was a public sector banker and in some levels from a resources perspective clearly, I come from a world definitely not from abundance, may be adequateness if I may say, it wasn't scarcity, but I was curious about when did you hit that inflection point in your life and number two, how have you learnt about cultivating an abundance mindset even if we come from a situation of let's say material scarcity?

RV: Yeah, well, most of us in that generation of India come from exactly the back... not most, the lucky ones of us came from that background of just about adequateness and a great emphasis on learning, but no, look this is not a new idea. I was looking at this line from Browning, the poet,

Robert Browning, it says, a man's reach must exceed his grasp. Then Gandhiji says, find the purpose, the means will follow. I then, one of my mentors was late Professor C. K. Prahalad and he influenced me a lot and he always used to emphasise to everybody, resourcefulness matters more than resources and that stuck with me. And if you look at companies that become great entrepreneurs or build businesses being scrappy, they all start out with an idea and a vision, a dream which vastly exceeds the initial resources. But somehow, they are able to over time accumulate or attract enough resources to build something substantial. So, I looked at these and so I first made the intellectual shift that this is actually very true. Then, of course, comes the hard part of applying it to your own life and changing. And so, my changes began more in terms of taking on endeavours which were ambitious and where the starting resources were tiny. Our experience starting Social Venture Partners together is a good example of that. Just an idea, two people, no resources and then you have a big event like Fastpitch Friday where you are able to mobilise so much resources and so much talent and so forth. So, my first experiences were oh Microsoft, let's set some incredibly audacious goal that doesn't seem possible. In fact, most people said this guy is going to get sacked because there is no way we are going to get there. But then what you believe is what you achieve and... so, in the business setting, in my professional setting, I began to see that this is absolutely true. Then the challenge comes, the ultimate challenge is applying it to yourself. So, I used to feel somewhat insecure about money and it didn't matter how much money you have, it is a mindset of insecurity. And then I spent about 6-7 years over the last decade cultivating an abundance mindset and I actually put practical steps in the book on that. Then I realised it is not just around money that you have scarcity and abundance, it is about everything. And for me, the next mountain on this is time. I feel incredibly scarce on time because I have so many things to do, so much to accomplish, so I am always watching the clock and I am always in a hurry and family and friends get a little frustrated with that behaviour. So, yeah, so this applies I think to all sorts of things, to expertise, to love, any number of things that abundance scarcity and it is I think you first make the intellectual shift and then you follow with your actions, you internalise. Did I answer the question, I am not sure?

DJ: It does, it does, it does. I think, yeah, in this podcast I was talking to this lady from Harvard Business School called Ashley Whillans. She has written a book about this notion of time poverty. And she says when you experience time scarcity at some level you start feeling a bit like, you know, it starts looking, the unhappiness seems a bit like material poverty at some level while you have all the material procession. So, I think, you are right. There is a multi, it is a multi-dimensional problem, the scarcity and abundance not just the monetary problem.

RV: Yeah, Nipun Mehta of ServiceSpace, he talks about so many forms of capital of which money is just one and probably not even the most important so...

DJ: Hmm, can we talk about that Ravi? I was going to talk, I was going to ask you about the different forms of capital later but since you bring it up, can you talk a little bit about, you know, the one thing that struck me, especially in my journey at Social Venture Partners is sometimes you can open connections, sometimes you can bring in your capability and there are just different vectors along which one could think about making a difference. So, can you expand this notion of multiple forms of capital?

RV: Yeah, so, multiple assets, multiple forms of capital show up in different ways. So, for instance, your friend who has also been on the podcast, Lynda Gratton, she does a very good job talking about the importance of cultivating intangible assets.

DJ: Yes.

RV: Look, many of us think about our financial assets, but other things like your expertise, your reputation, your networks, your close relationships, your health, your self-knowledge, all these things are even more important and you better be intentional about cultivating these things as well. It is a powerful idea, very few people even think about it let alone do it. So, that's one manifestation of this multiple forms of capital or assets. Then Nipun Mehta's sort of construct, which is more about when you are giving, you are helping, you are serving, it is not just money you bring to it because the world needs much more than just money. So, are you bringing love, are you bringing energy, are you bringing expertise, are you bringing networks? So, these are all different forms of capital and all of them are powerful and greatly needed. And so, he comes at when you are serving, don't just think about money, think about all these other forms of capital that you have that you are bringing to the table. I find it very, very powerful. And that's the essence at SVP, right? Of course, we bring a little bit of money, it's catalytic but fundamentally what we bring to the not-for-profit world is the talent, the energy, the expertise, the networks of all our partners. So, yeah, but we have never articulated it that way but.

DJ: Hmm, and even yesterday since you referred to Fastpitch, you know, we had picked 12 organisations, we had helped them develop a sharp pitch, in less than five minutes they presented but to me what was most inspiring was the fact that there were about 600-plus people, CSR and philanthropists that attended the presentation and hopefully that triggered something in them. So, to your point about being catalytic, hopefully, they will go on to do either contributing to these 12 or do something else as they move forward.

RV: Yeah, they probably... I have missed this fantastic event, but to me I suspect that for the NGOs that got represent or at any stage of the process the single biggest thing is self-belief that today they believe more strongly what their potential is, what they are capable of and all the other things are important, but this belief is what I think is going to propel them forward. So, that's a different form of capital.

DJ: So true, so true. You know, just maybe staying with this for 30 more seconds, I worked with one of the organisations, Maya CARE that works with people with disability and helps the elderly in providing services, and we were coaching an individual who was on a wheelchair and who, you know, who hadn't presented on this kind of a stage. To see him present and to sort of really walk away with that belief is quite powerful. I hadn't quite framed it in my head, but that's, hopefully that makes a difference in their trajectory moving forward.

RV: I think it makes it a trajectory to everyone though that person but also all of us who get to observe this.

DJ: Of course.

RV: It changes us.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here again. During the conversation, Ravi refers to an insight from Lynda Gratton (LG) about different kinds of intangible assets. Here is a short clip of her talking about the different kinds of assets.

LG: *"Well you know as you and I in the book we talked about three types of intangible assets we talked about Productive assets, Vitality assets and transformation assets and I think really you know*

in your 40s the productive assets becomes really important because you need to keep on landing you need to keep on building new skills you need to be saying to yourself and to the labour market you know I am still somebody who has gone lot to offer from now until the age of 70s so that's really crucial but also of course transformational assets and those as we said earlier they are they are transformational assets a lot to do with your networks."

DJ: Even with Networks, there is an opportunity for us to think about the different kinds of networks we engage with. Herminia Ibarra (HI) has an interesting frame for us to think about the different kinds of networks we interface with.

HI: *"We do passes certain point in our career we do everything through relationship this is how we get things done, that's how we find out what's going on, and that's how we get advice, perspective. And most people who are doing well have very good operational networks just help them get the day to day work done more smoothly maybe you know lets something done faster for them or they will get the information they need sooner but you know it is really kind of what's in the critical path of my routine day to day work that's the operational network. The personal network is the part that is you know the people that you have worked with who become friends and you have stayed in touch with and there is more emotional quality to it or may be some old mentors and there is often common interest there are longer term relations and most of this have those too and then the hard part, the tricky part is strategic network which has to do you know if the operation is about you today the personal often if about your past the strategic is about future and it's about how do you connect the dots between some of your interest and relationships that are may be external to your company, some of the internal relationships, help connect people, help bridge across different areas, help bring new ideas in, help export new ideas"*

DJ: My big realization is that very often, when we take stock of life, we end up becoming narrow and unidimensional. But things like our physical and mental health, our vitality, our relationships within the family and in the network, the trust we have in the ecosystems around us, our reputation and Personal Brand, all these are assets which have a material impact on the quality of our personal and professional lives. My wife and I keep discussing that when we look around with this holistic lens, the only emotion that comes up is that of gratitude for the number of things that are going well and with how some of the intangible assets are coming along.

Pause for a moment here. How do you think about your Balance Sheet? What items do you put in there?

Let's now get back to the conversation with Ravi Venkatesan.

DJ: Moving themes, Ravi, I loved your take on specialists and generalists as well. I love the quote in your book "the world needs birds and frogs, but in an uncertain and fast-changing world birds can find new habitats and food better than frogs and generalists will probably end up having more opportunities and can adapt to change better". Can you say more about how you see these specialists and generalists' question and also a little bit around how we should think about this over time? Is there a... the typical paradigm often is diverged and then converge, you know, diverge to build capability and then converge to exploit those capabilities. How do you think about that?

RV: So, of course this framing of frogs and birds is Freeman Dyson's but like everything he said and wrote about, I love it. Yeah, so, look for a long time again when the world was stable what was valuable was expertise and so it rewarded depth, particularly technical depth in any area. When the world is more fluid and fast-changing that's both not enough and fairly risky because whatever

expertise you have may suddenly not be so valuable. So, for instance, let's say you are an expert and ustad on repairing engines in a world that is rapidly trying to shift to electric vehicles, yeah, it could leave you stranded. So, yeah, so, I think what you want to be in this environment is a Swiss army knife rather than a carving knife or a bread knife or some special purpose knife because the circumstances and the food sources may change rather suddenly. And so, that's the argument I make around generalist versus specialist. But it is not either or so much as is there a way to integrate both. And I would suspect that the answer lies in having somewhat of a T profile, where you have some expertise in some area and that is what grounds you, that's what gets you going in your journey. But then on top of that is a horizontal, versatile set of skills and that probably is the more optimal way of approaching it is my own sense. Yeah, naturally, I have navigated towards being more of a generalist and, you know, even back 30 years ago when I was studying at business school, I didn't choose finance or a particular function; I chose general management and I have enjoyed general management more than something more specialised all my life. And I think it is in large part that which has enabled me to make so many different transitions over the decades.

DJ: Hmm. It is a great point Ravi and to your earlier point about really the what do you say the top of the class getting disproportional returns and not having room for mediocrity. So, the tension I see is how do you be a Swiss army knife, but at the same time ensure that you are top of the class of something, you know and not a me too.

RV: That's the paradox that you need to solve. And in my case for instance, I find that I am relatively good, I wouldn't say top of the class, but pretty decent at working with people, aligning people, getting people working behind a common goal, and that turns out to be a pretty valuable skill because 100 years from now it is probably still going to be relevant. So, you need to find whatever equivalent of that is for you.

DJ: Hmm, and I think back to your metaphor about the T, one of the pieces I learnt from Lynda Gratton whom you referred to is she talks about the notion of a Pi, you know, and the nuance she says is if you look at the symbol pi, the mathematical symbol pi, you have got one leg, one leg straight and the other leg in the air. So, she says one for stability and one to sort of proactively think about the future and I thought it was quite interesting.

RV: That's a lovely...

DJ: It was a little bit of a forward-looking hedge if you will.

RV: Yeah.

DJ: Moving topics Ravi, you work with GAME, you have set up GAME and one of the themes I have been curious about is how do you think, how do you get somebody to think and behave like an entrepreneur and you are trying to do this at scale with GAME? Can you talk to us a little bit about GAME? What you are trying to do there, but also what have you learnt about building entrepreneurs?

RV: Sure. So, look, the world is going through a period where the supply of jobs will not be able to keep pace with the demand for jobs partly because jobs as a construct is an industrial era thing, which is going away as companies want more fluid contracts. And also, we are doing a better job educating larger numbers of people. So, the supply side is increasing handily. So, if this supply-demand gap is not short term, but actually is structural and long-term and what you want to do is get more people becoming entrepreneurs and both to feed themselves as well as maybe create livelihoods for a few more, and of course, in some parts of the world, entrepreneurship is

flourishing, in our own country it is doing very well in some of the larger cities like Bangalore or Gurgaon, but the question is how do you, is it possible to catalyse this so it spreads like wildfire to our smaller cities, towns and rural India, So, that's the whole purpose of GAME and our work is to try and make it aspirational, get more people to think about this as a conscious choice and number one or two on their choices, rather than a government job. And then how do you help them think about an idea and incubate it and how do you create an environment that promotes growth so on and so forth. That's what we are trying to do in GAME. But along the way we have realised that look, while not everybody may want to be an entrepreneur or capable of being an entrepreneur, in a very, very fast changing 21st century, everybody needs an entrepreneurial mindset. It doesn't matter what you are going to do but the chances are if you have an entrepreneurial mindset, you will be more successful. Now, what is it about the entrepreneur's mindset? I think there are four or five things. One is they are able to sense opportunity, every problem to an entrepreneur is an opportunity in disguise. To somebody else every opportunity is a problem. So, you want to help people make this shift. So, this garbage lying on the streets oh, it is an opportunity for a waste business, climate change is the mother of all opportunities. So, every, so get them to sense and see opportunity and then act on something that moves them. So, that's one aspect of an entrepreneurial mindset. A second one is this idea of resources versus resourcefulness. Don't get crushed by the fact that you don't have resources to start with. How do you bootstrap yourself is a very powerful idea? So, for instance, somebody may have an engineering degree from a not a particularly good college and they can't find a job. If you have this bootstrap mentality and say, look, I don't mind starting out as a Swiggy delivery person, but that's not where I am going to end my life, that's just how I am going to get going and bootstrap myself and then in the off hours I am going to do something else and then I am... so, that's why I point out that this mindset is very crucial, problem solving is another thing that every entrepreneur has to do. Every day there are new problems and you better figure out how to solve them fast. That's pretty handy in life as well. Tenacity, not giving up staying with it, staying with it until you encounter success is another attribute. So, what we are saying is every person will benefit and be more successful if they have some of these mindset and skills and we found that it is teachable. So, my co-founder Mekin has done some of the most pioneering work in the world and in over a 1,000 Delhi government schools for three years, he and others have been running this entrepreneurship mindset curriculum for young people, grades 9 to 12. And from the sort of most difficult challenging backgrounds. Think about, who sends their kids to government schools these days because even your cook, maid, security guard, driver, they send their kids to English medium schools. So, this is the next level of the pyramid and kids from that environment have flourished. So, we have demonstrated and learned that this is not something you are born with, it is no way correlated to socioeconomic backgrounds, everybody can learn these skills. Some will become entrepreneurs; most won't, all will be better off.

DJ: Hmm. And of course, this is a large programme but at a headline level what do you see are the key elements of the curriculum? What does it take, what are the different vectors to think about in terms of unlocking an entrepreneurial mindset?

RV: So, these are some of the attributes. So, empathy is one. Without empathy, you are not going to be able to connect with an opportunity. So, for instance, one person goes walks down a street completely oblivious to what's around, another one looks at all the garbage lying around and is offended by this. The second person is more likely to do something about it. So, how do you teach empathy? How do you people to open up all their senses and feel? So, there are ways we do that. It is a rare that you are going to be able to accomplish something on your own, forget entrepreneurship, in this world, very few things require you to be a solo. In fact, the more, if you are actually just an IC, your work can probably be most automated. You are at greatest risk of automation. The more your work is interdisciplinary, collaborative etc., the safer you are. So,

learning to work in teams is a very, very crucial skill. So, you know, and that can't be taught in a classroom. So, you do it experientially by giving people projects or tasks to accomplish where they have to work with others.

DJ: I understand.

RV: Through practice they get better at it. You give them lots of challenges. So, in the book, I gave the example of how Udyam teaches tenacity? You have to accomplish some complicated tasks with your non-dominant hand, and it is intensely frustrating to build a paper plane with your non-dominant hand, but no, even if it takes you one hour and the end product isn't all that great you stick with it. Now, it starts exercising that muscle called tenacity. So, every one of these attributes that we have laid out and there are about 10 of them can be learned in an experiential way in a relatively short period of time. It is very encouraging.

DJ: Lovely, lovely. And you spoke about waste management a couple of times Ravi in the book actually. I love your definition of leadership in the book, right? You say it is not an elite calling, it is the unrecognised potential in each one of us and you speak about what leadership looks like today in the world we live in the context of your neighbour Padmashree and how she moved from being a homemaker and a part-time teacher to becoming a leader in the space of waste management. So, can you sort of talk to us about this sort of this example of if I may use the term everyday leadership, right, and the fact that leaders could come from anywhere, if you could just expand on that?

RV: Yeah, so, I make the case and I devote a whole chapter to this idea that leadership is the central issue of our times. And you look at the world at any level, planet, country, city, neighbourhood, company, whatever unit, you will find that there is lots of problems but most of the solutions, many of the solutions exist, the resources exist, the talent know-how exists but somehow the problem doesn't get solved it persists and in fact grows bigger. And the reason for that is lack of leadership. Then you think further, why is there lack of leadership? Because our mental model of leadership is completely obsolete and unhelpful which is it is correlated with people who have title in a formal authority, etc. So, you expect the government to do something, the politician to do something, the manager to do something and mostly they don't. The system is in stable equilibrium because it suits all sorts of people with formal power to keep things the way they are. So, if things are going to get better, you have to get many more people not waiting to be rescued and helped but stepping up and being part of the solution and that's leadership. So, I say leadership in the 21st century is not a noun, it is not a title, it is not a position, it's actually an act, it is a verb. And that act is something that every human being is capable of. And so, I give examples like Padmashree, I give an example of a young boy who lives in a slum, a garbage dump in Ahmedabad and goes to a Teach for India school. I give example of a young mentee of mine who is now a successful young woman who started Kids for Code etc. and I said look, none of these cases that they have any formal authority, nobody asked them to do what they did. They felt a calling, they have decided to act on it and they have accomplished far more than what they would have imagined and what the world imagined they could accomplish. And so, to me this is the most powerful inspiring model for how we create a functioning society, how we create a functioning planet, which is leadership comes from anywhere and everywhere, it is ordinary people doing extraordinary things not about extraordinary people and I lay out what are the steps by which you can get started. And again, I go back to young people, young children, and my work with UNICEF where we go to government schools, we get them involved in civic activities, little volunteering activities, change making activities of the smallest sort and that gives them a sense of agency. So, the example I give is, in a government school the school toilet hasn't functioned for three years, you have complained to the teacher, you have complained to the principal, nothing is happening, there is indifference apathy all around. So, we said look, why don't you fix it. And in the beginning, there is a shock, what do you mean I fixing it up, people will

object or I don't know how to start and then you organise them, go find your friends and then you help them support them and pretty soon the toilet is fixed. And you have now developed that agency that is self-confident, oh, I am capable of doing something about some of my problems and no longer just a passive victim. And by the way, when I decided to go work on this issue others also joined me because they were vexed by the same thing. They just wanted somebody else to take the lead and so you develop followership and that feels pretty good. So, through these actions the flywheel starts and who knows where it may lead. So, I think it is incredibly important that all of us, be part of the solution to some problem that's bugging us. And the other thing I say is, look, this is the mother of all skills in the 21st century. If this is what the world is short of, if you are good at it, you don't have to worry about employment and finding food or how to put food on the table or any of these things. People are going to be beating a path to your door. Now, Padmashree since you talked about her. I mean, she is the most prominent citizen activist on waste. BBMP, the government, the municipal authority will not move on any issue without consulting her. Corporates that are thinking about their waste and recycling issues, they come to her; entrepreneurs come to her. She doesn't have to... and if she chose to monetise it, she could, for her that's not the issue. So, I say this is the most useful durable skill that you could possibly develop.

DJ: And may be just to stay with this example Ravi, can you talk to us about her journey from her beginnings just to give the average listener a sense of what's possible.

RV: Well, she just lives a few streets away from me in, Koramangala in Bangalore and her journey began a few years ago, five-six years ago when she got frustrated, where the garbage in front of her house on the street and despite complaining it was there and it was this ugly festering dark spot. So, her first action was simply to begin to clear it herself. And then other residents decided, this is terrible, you can't have a middle-aged lady doing this. So, they joined and so, in fact many of us on Sundays in the early days used to get together and beautify these spots. So, there was a similar ugly spot in front of our house and I remember the Sunday in 2015, when a whole bunch of people got together, we cleared it, we painted it and then we put some potted plants so that it would stay clean and then made a picture of a God or something so nobody will urinate out there. So, you do these things. Then you say, oh, now we have cleared all the spots, what's next? So, you are feeling good about doing this work, then you take on this plastics, single-use plastics and say, how do we minimise the use of single-use plastic? Can we get every household now to segregate wet and dry waste so it becomes easier to compost the wet and recycle the dry? So, you then, so each thing leads to something bigger. Right now, what she is leading is what is called a 7-star project in one of the wards in Bangalore. 7-star in Swachh Bharat is the highest level of systemic cleanliness you can achieve. So, there is a project which involves civil society, citizens, companies and BBMP to create Bangalore's first model ward, which is 7-star with a plan to replicate that success across the city. I mean, wow, it is just unimaginable in just five-six years.

DJ: Hmm. Just moving forward, Ravi, one of the questions I think about back to your, back to our conversation in the beginning around choices. Is this... even if we look at the example of someone like a Mekin and you starting GAME and someone like a Padmashree, if I were to relate it to the way I see it, sometimes I find there is an inside-out approach to situations where you say these are the things I am passionate about, these are the things that give me energy and, you know, let me take a baby step see where it goes, take another step see where it goes and just sort of keep it anchored around where I find my meaning, purpose and energy. There is the other approach where you start with a big problem, right? Millions of jobs, we need to solve this at scale, we need to have a systemic response, how do we sort of attack this and then you come up with an approach and you engage. How have you thought about, is it a binary question? I find there are certain kinds of people, you know, I got this feedback once that one of my earlier colleagues told me I have an artisanal mindset and somehow that stayed with me. And even in the way I think about the podcast or the work I do, it

is a very, in a way closer to the Padmashree approach than a Mekin approach if I may paint those two paradigms. But how do you think about that and what's your guidance to people when they are at the crossroads?

RV: I don't know. I always go back to that Ikigai diagram of the intersecting circles of what you are good at, what you enjoy doing, and what the world needs and values. And somehow, you have to try and find your, swim your way to the intersection of this. And obviously, it is not a static thing, it is a moving thing. So, there are so many opportunities in the world, there are so many challenges in the world, I am not drawn to many of them. You pay attention to what you are drawn towards and usually it will be things that you enjoy doing and there is some element of what you enjoy and what you are good at in there. So, for instance, my next big mission is in climate change and it is in particular around energy transition to renewable energy and energy access, and this is a global scale project. So, we all know that there is this problem out there, why this problem? Well, I look at myself. I intellectually enjoy very, very complex, wicked problems, because it is like a puzzle. Some people like doing Wordle; I like these types of problems, that's me, okay? So, I am drawn to that. It requires, many, many stakeholders to come together and collaborate. Well, that's another thing I both enjoy, and I am fairly good at and know how to connect and engage and build trust and get people to want to come together behind something. I have a lot of experience building these types of alliances now first with GAME then globally with UNICEF. So, I am a little further down that journey in terms of having lived and walked it and knowing what mistakes to avoid than many others. So, that's a useful skill. So, it is that intersection that you need to define. Yeah, so, and it is not something that you can sit and think your way towards. You can't sit in a room or chat with a friend and figure it out, you have to experiment your way, feel... one of the phrases I use most often in all my talks and my writing is Deng Xiaoping's phrase, which is you cross the river by feeling your way across the stones. I think it is the most beautiful metaphor moving in the face of uncertainty. So, you make experiments and the feedback of those experiments you gradually gravitate to this intersection of sweet spot.

DJ: Hmm. I guess just maybe staying with this for a couple of minutes, even back to your experience when you are at Microsoft, when you are doing one thing, often the metrics of progress are easy to measure, but when you doing many things, often it is hard to get a sense of am I doing enough, am I moving the needle and if I see it in my context, right, I think the how do I transition, how do I reinvent is a mass problem, but I am trying to sort of trying to have a cottage industry kind of an approach to solving an industrial problem if you know what I mean. So, sometimes I wonder if I am doing enough. So, I wonder how you think about success and metrics as you move forward?

RV: Clearly, I think that is one of the central questions of life. How will you measure your life and it is not a new question, it is there?

DJ: Yes.

RV: The Greek philosophers talked about it etc. and I have... it is also something that evolves if you are intentional. And so, my definition of what success is at 30 is very different from what it is at 60. And I have come, there was a couple questions actually intertwined cleverly in your thing but... so, there is a broader question of how do you figure out how you are going to define success for yourself? And then I thought I heard a second question which was embedded which says, look, when you are doing these kinds of complex things, how do you know if you are even making a difference? In Microsoft, market share, growth, profitability are easy metrics. I think these are two different questions. So, on the second one, look, we are tackling incredibly complex systems change issues out there. And so, you just show up every day and chip away chip away and mostly nothing is happening. And then sometimes suddenly something big will improve and that's rather hard to predict and so

forth. So, I drew... and you can get very depressed because on a day-to-day month-to-month basis, you don't see much happening. That's why I draw courage from Mother Teresa, one of the things she said was in life there are no great things, there are just small things done with great love. And sometimes, something small becomes something big but there is no way of counting on it or predicting it. And so, I say as Buddha says, the most important thing is to show up and sit and something might happen. But if you don't sit nothing is going to happen, that's guaranteed. So, that's how I choose to view it and so you also need to have a portfolio of things some of which give you feedback on a daily basis. So, going out to a street and being kind to people gives you that that big kick that you need, that gratification whereas this long-term stuff may or may not. Also, I have come to the conclusion that none of what I do may actually matter to the world, but it matters profoundly to how I feel about myself and therefore it is worth persisting. And that has taken some years. So, I am not under any illusion that we will create a mass entrepreneurship movement. Obviously, I don't tell funders that, but yeah, it is a very, very tough problem and we may make a dent here and a scratch there, but it is not at all certain that we will succeed in our mission. But just when I look back at the end of my life, I think I am going to feel very good about at least having not wasted my life just feathering my nest but tackling something important. So, that's a long-winded answer to that second question on how do you measure success. Then again, I am profoundly, profoundly influenced by this one sentence from a professor at Stanford, former professor at Stanford called James Marsh and I use that as I put it everywhere, I have it in front of me right now. He says, look at the end we are a very minor blip in a cosmic story and he says all our aspirations for importance and significance are just illusions, all our hopes are minor except to us, but some things do matter, mostly be... and what might make a difference to us is if in our tiny roles in our brief time we inhabit life gently and add more beauty than ugliness. So, for me this is the most beautiful statement of how you might want to measure your life. And therefore, all you have to do is get specific about what do I need to do to walk more gently, what does that mean and given the unique assets that I have that we talked about earlier, different forms of capital assets, how can I contribute to making the world a little more beautiful? And so, I found my answer at this point to those two questions and I think this may be a reasonable question for everyone that is searching, which is your way of doing it is helping people find their potential and making their lives and the world consequently more beautiful in that process and that's something you are uniquely capable of doing. So, yeah, that's how I have reasoned my view. I am not saying this is the answer of what has worked for me.

DJ: And the one phrase just to understand Ravi when you say walk more gently, what does that term mean to you?

RV: Well, one is be kind, walk more gently on people's feelings and emotions, jaywalk more gently on the planet making incredibly irresponsible thuds, what does that mean in terms of our personal consumption, personal habits, and can you be little lighter in terms of that. Yeah, those would be two examples of walking more gently.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. Building on the point that Ravi makes around walking more gently, one of my earlier Guests Venkat Krishnan (VK) (Founder of GiveIndia) speaks with a tremendous sense of vulnerability about the notion of an Emotional Foot print that speaks to a similar theme.

VK: *"Kind of like the carbon footprint, right? So, I think, you leave in your interactions with people you leave them feeling better or feeling worse. So, when you leave people feeling better, you have an*

emotional positive what Steven Covey calls emotional bank account balance, and this idea first occurred to me when I read 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. I am a ridiculously low EQ guy. Everything even emotions I actually calculate, think about etc. and I know that I am going to have hurt far more people in my life than I would have brought joy to, emotionally speaking, I mean, and I am not... I am discounting of course that I might have helped somebody get food and therefore they are able to have a happy family and there is an emotional payoff of all of that and something like that, I am discounting that, I am just looking at more from a personal ecosystem point of view a bunch of friends, relatives, family, other people etc. And if I look at their emotional expectations from me, I am going to leave most people short-changed on that in my life and it hurts, that that's going to happen, but I do keep going back to it periodically, it's difficult to change yourself as you get older, but I tried and I have made some changes but I am wired the way I am and my one regret when I finally die is going to be that I have left a negative and emotional footprint on the earth."

DJ: I guess, there is an opportunity for each one of us to focus not just on the what we do but How we come across when we do what we do?

Let's now get back to the conversation with Ravi.

DJ: Another term I loved in your book Ravi was this term stotting. You talk about how a gazelle in the animal world signals its capability and you also quote Sheryl Sandberg, where she says develop your voice not your brand and you suggest that we need to think marketing and not sales when it comes to signalling our capability in a crowded world. Can you expand on this for us?

RV: Yeah, it is a very fine balance. So, first of all, this is a difficult unforgiving world in some ways and so it is important that you have some skills and be excellent. But the world around you needs to recognise that, and so you have to signal and that's why I use the metaphor of stotting where the gazelle just goes up and down in the same place while it is grazing. So, the leopard knows don't waste your time; I am a pretty fit guy and I am going to outrun you. So, go find somebody else who's not able to spring up quite so well. And so, you need to find ways to do that without becoming one of these just ugly relentlessly, self-promoting individuals. It is a fine line, you can easily cross over without even intending to, to where all you are doing is self-promotion. And I see some very smart, very good people who have lost that plot. But some of it is important, and that's why I like what Sheryl Sandberg says, which is don't talk about yourself or just go on tweeting or doing something silly, actually lead with thought leadership. So, signal, where putting out some ideas that are well thought through, genuinely useful and that's a useful way. I have embraced that myself. I am not out there just relentlessly on social media. I occasionally put stuff out there on LinkedIn and I put a lot of thought and effort into it. And as a result, I think there is a growing number of people who are drawn towards listening to those ideas. What happens then is you build a reputation and that reputation then attracts opportunities. And so, I think in today's world it is just a failing strategy to go chasing opportunities, chasing a job and one of these things. The far more and in fact the only effective way is to build a reputation and attract people and opportunities to you and then you can sit there and say this interesting or that interesting or not, and that's why I talk about marketing rather than sales. And in fact, that's the way it works. I often get people to do a simple exercise, and maybe some of your listeners would want to do it. You write down all the significant experiences, professional, personal that you have had over the last whatever period of time, 20-30 years and then you ask yourself how did this happen? How did Microsoft happen to me? How did UNICEF happen to me? And then you look at, and as you look at it very carefully you will find except maybe some of the earliest ones, nine out of ten times the opportunity came to you. It is rare that you will find that you did something because you decided, you went and made all the effort and you landed it. Maybe that was applicable early in your career where you decided I want to go and study at that college and you

were very intentional and focused around it and you achieved but since then much of what happens is attracted into your life. I think there is something spiritual out here but even if you leave the spirituality out it comes down to two very practical things called your networks and your reputation. And if you have built your reputation and your networks, you would like a fishing net, you land a bigger and bigger catch. And so, I think this is very important to do. But maintain a balance and not go nuts and do self-promotion.

DJ: Ravi, as we wrap up, a few questions where maybe just top of mind, one- or two-line responses. One leader who inspires you today in the way he or she is intentional about their life?

RV: It's a difficult question but off the top of my head I would say a couple of the people who have endorsed my book. So, Nandan Nilekani for instance, he is my neighbour, he has been a friend and a mentor and I have sort of really enjoyed and been inspired by the way he has evolved and made his transitions from being a Founder at Infosys to going off and joining government and building Aadhaar and then what he has done with India Stack and education, the work he and his wife Rohini do in philanthropy. I find that pretty inspiring.

DJ: What's the one insight from the book that has really struck a chord and resonated with the people that have read it?

RV: I think the ideas which have got the most resonance is stop looking for a job, figure out how fast to be a freelancer passion economy and the other one is the idea of these super skills or meta skills, the notion that there is leadership capacity in every one of us and there is leadership responsibility that we face. Yeah, it is interesting because the audience is so diverse, Deepak, I think different things resonate with different people particularly in your different career stages, life stages.

DJ: The one lesson you have learnt that you wish you had known 10 years back?

RV: I don't know about a lesson, but I certainly think I would care less about what others think or their approval or disapproval of my choices. I think I could have been freer much sooner.

DJ: Hmm. And the one choice in the past you would make differently with the wisdom of hindsight?

RV: I think I would have chosen, I would and I am still actively working on it, I would choose to be enjoy every day and every step of the journey more. I have had this tendency to always be in the future thinking about what next, what to accomplish instead of enjoying this moment much more and I am trying.

DJ: Hmm. The one accomplishment that you value that the rest of the world doesn't know about?

RV: Nothing, there is no accomplishment in that sense. But I do think there is something I do, which I enjoy, which much of the world doesn't know about which is Sonali and I, we take care of a lot of dogs, a lot of animals out of a community that looks after a huge number of dogs and gives us a lot of joy and pleasure and so forth. Yeah, so that's one thing.

DJ: Lovely. Ravi, as you know, this podcast is titled Play to Potential. Any summary thoughts to the listeners in the context of the book you have just written?

RV: Yes, I think, you are such a skilled interlocutor it has caused me to become even more intentional about all these topics. So, 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.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Rich Fernandez that is referenced: [Attention and Meta-Attention](#).

Nugget from Lynda Gratton that is referenced: [Mid-life: a double whammy](#).

Nugget from Herminia Ibarra that is referenced: [Operational, Personal and Strategic networks](#).

Nugget from Venkat Krishnan that is referenced: [The Full Conversation](#).

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Driving Change: Ability to drive change in an organization 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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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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