



Context to the nugget

“Find the balance to feed your stomach and feed your soul”: that’s the mantra for delivering to your potential, according to Papa CJ. In this nugget he talks about the qualities of being a good stand-up comedian and how these requirements actually transcend profession and time. Listen on to find tips to harness the true power of your potential.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): If you had to decode the recipe of a good comedian, what are the three–four traits or characteristics that you would highlight?

Papa CJ (CJ): I think, the one thing that is really important is honesty. You have to be able to be honest with your audience but more than anything else you have to be able to be honest with yourself, what I find I admire the most in any comedian is authenticity. You see, we operate in a profession that has no rules, no boundaries, no guidelines, and no social norms that say you can say this or you can’t say this. So, for the first time, you are thrown into a space where you have to ask yourself, what I genuinely feel about these things without any social conditioning. And it is an incredible journey of self-discovery. I mean, I call stand-up comedy an outward expression of an inward journey. So, for me, authenticity is critical. If you’re trying to be somebody else on stage, the audience will see through that. Finding your voice is a journey. You can’t be this person right at the start. When you start performing, you’re trying to please everyone. You want the confidence that you can make people laugh. Over the course of time, as you find your own voice, you’re just being yourself. I mean, at this point of time, I’m doing it more for myself than for them. If you like it, fine; if you don’t like it, also fine, you can leave. Eventually, your audience will find you. The people who don’t like your kind of stuff will wean themselves out automatically. So, authenticity, number one.

Number two, vulnerability. An audience wants to see somebody they can relate to. In India, there’s a misconception, people start thinking of stand-up comedy or comedians as celebrities. It is the antithesis of celebrity. Because as a celebrity, I can say, hey, you know what it’s like when you’re getting bored and you buy a car for 100,000 dollars. No, they don’t know what it’s like. But as a comedian, I can talk about a receding hairline. I can talk about a bad marriage. I can talk about failing at things. And my audience can relate to that. That is very important. One of the biggest compliments I ever got was from a woman who thought she was offending me. She said, ‘If you don’t mind, can I say something?’ I said, ‘Yeah, sure!’ She said, ‘You are like us only.’ And I don’t think she realized what a big compliment that was. Because it’s very important for your audience to be able to feel that you’re one of them. That’s what makes them go with you.

So, authenticity, vulnerability, and like I said, a really, really thick skin. You have got to be able to go the distance. Also, I think, it's not important to have something different to say but to have a point of view that is unique to you. I never understood this when I was starting out and it's still something that's difficult to do. But if all the jokes you did, all the stories you told on stage, if somebody else picked up and was able to perform them, then it's probably not you. I never understood that when I was starting out and it's something that's still difficult to do. But I can see how that would work with a show like 'Naked'. Nobody else can do that show. And I think, that's important, to have your own individual voice and your persona.

DJ: I think, like in any creative profession, there is always the inside-out versus the outside-in, which is often market driven. So, what I hear you say is, over the long term, the more and more you are inside out...

CJ: See, the outside also matters. I mean you've still got to be professional. You've still got to be funny. You've still got to deliver. You've still got to pay the bills. You've still got to have a brand that you have to build brand is really important. But 90% of most business is relationships and networks and your personal brand. A lot of people can do the job, but the question is who that client wants to work with. In consulting, you have the airport test, for example, that if you were to miss a flight and you were stuck in an airport for six hours with that person, could you sit with this person? Often it's that.

DJ: You spoke about marathon versus sprint. As you look at the people that have come into this profession in India, in the West, if you look at the people that fall off the hopper, over the short term, what are the failures? What are the reasons people don't stick the course?

CJ: I'm not sure I would call them failures. It's a very difficult course to stick. Stand-up is not easy to get good at. It is a tough thing to do and you've got to constantly write new material, you've got to constantly reinvent. It's not like it's an admin job. I wouldn't call them failures. It's something you try and maybe you find it's not for you, but there's something else for you. I genuinely believe, as human beings, it is our duty to find something that we love doing because the only way you can be the best in the world at something is if it's something that you love doing. Otherwise, you will never put in the kind of effort that is required to be brilliant at that. I also believe that if you don't do what it is that you're meant to be doing this is a bit philosophical then not only are you depriving yourself of happiness but you are also depriving the world of somebody who was meant to be a painter or a singer or musician or whatever the case might be. It's all about delivering to your potential. There are too many people who are stuck in jobs because they have to pay the bills and they are going there nine to five, hoping to find their potential or happiness outside that job. I understand, you've got to feed the stomach and you have to feed the soul. You have to find a balance, so that you can, somehow, finance feeding your soul. That is the Holy Grail.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What struck me here was the notion of Authenticity and the connection with Leadership. And possibly even in parenting. In my experience, in both these situations, it is often a lot less about what you say or what you do but it is often about who you are being in the process and how you show up.

Thank you for listening. For more please visit playtopotential.com or subscribe the podcast on iTunes, Stitcher or one of the other Podcast apps.

End of nugget transcription

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Excellence: Learn how individuals from across disciplines have pushed themselves to move to the very top of their field and profession. As we move towards a flattening world with a leveling of the playing field, there is a high risk of being commoditized if we do not strive towards excellence. You can access the playlist [here](#).

SIGN UP TO OUR COMMUNICATION

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

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

Papa CJ - Nuggets

- 04.00 Papa CJ - The Full Conversation
- 04.01 Papa CJ - Why 'Naked'?
- 04.02 Papa CJ - Oxford MBA, consulting, stand-up
- 04.03 Papa CJ - Plunging into stand-up
- 04.04 Papa CJ - Stand-up: Unknown unknowns
- 04.05 Papa CJ - Stand-Up: What it takes
- 04.06 Papa CJ - Lessons from a journey in stand-up
- 04.07 Papa CJ - Role of vulnerability in building trust
- 04.08 Papa CJ - What corporates could learn from stand-up
- 04.09 Papa CJ - Three things they don't teach you in B-school

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

Disclaimer and clarification of intent behind the transcripts

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

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

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

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