



The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. To its right are contact details: a WhatsApp icon with the number '+91 85914 52129*', a Twitter icon with the handle '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with the website 'playtopotential.com'. Further right, under the heading 'Also available on:', are icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. On the far right, a portrait of a man in a suit and glasses is shown, with a red callout box below it identifying him as 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman'. At the bottom left of the banner, a small note reads: '*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

Context to the nugget

Ravi's career trajectory has often taken him to sectors and organizations he did not know much about. The key to his successful transitioning, according to him, has been listening; but listening to what and whom? Get the details and some tips in this anecdotal nugget.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Could you double click on what is listening? How do you listen? Where do you listen, to really come up to speed on the situation?

Ravi Venkatesan (RV): So, as you know about 18 months ago, I took on a completely new role as the chairman of a public-sector bank. Now, I know nothing about banking and I know even less about public sector, but yet Raghuram Rajan and Jayant Sinha felt that it was important that I take it on, so I did. Now, what do you do in this situation? And you know that the place is filled with landmines and you can step on anything without realizing it and get blown up. So, what you have to do is listen intently, and I did. I made a very conscious effort to listen to a bunch of people. The retired chairman of Bank of Baroda so help me understand from your perspective, what I should do, what the issues are, how would you handle them. And you get a certain perspective. I went and spoke to [Narayanan] Vaghul of ICICI and P J Nayak of Axis Bank, because they've been around and seen the evolution of the banking sector. I met a lot of our own employees and so forth. So, from this, you begin to piece together, first, the situation and then, out of that emerges a theory of change, which is, what interventions are really going to make a difference and who are going to be the important allies in this. If you don't listen and you come in with a point of view, you start jumping into action right away, you're going to make a lot of mistakes, because you haven't built this nuanced and reasonably accurate picture of the landscape. So, I am very, very intentional about these things.

DJ: Sometimes an organization is used to a leader who is a domain expert, sometimes a leader gets appointed from a different world. So, while the leader is listening, the organization is judging on a different set of metrics. How do you balance that tension of building credibility with the team that's measuring you on domain while you are trying to listen and come up to speed?

RV: I don't know that I agree that the organization is measuring you on domain. They are measuring you on how is this guy or this gal going to add value. Now, somebody may add value by being the domain expert. So, they quickly come in, they've seen the situation before; like a good doctor, they say, do ABC. And somebody like me, who comes clueless, has to add value in a different way to earn the respect of people, and you've got to figure out what really matters.

So, in Microsoft, it was clear why the company had hired me. It was because we were becoming irrelevant in a country of a billion people, so they wanted not a technology guy, or at least Bill and Steve wanted, somebody who understood India. So, within six months, I said, in order to become relevant, this is what it takes and here's a set of things we ought to be doing, and it was plausible. I don't think it was rocket science or brilliant. They said, 'Great, now go do it. Where's your team? And by the way, here is a billion dollars of investment. Go make it happen'. And the team in India said, 'Wow, holy cow! This guy really has done an amazing job, getting us all this investment'. They used to beg for every head count, and suddenly, we had an abundance of riches. That won me credibility.

At the bank, I saw a highly dysfunctional board process, in my first board meeting on August 22nd, 2015. I blew up the whole board process, and the very next board meeting, the September board meeting, was done in a profoundly different way. It's done like the way an Infosys would operate or anything like that. And people perceived and felt that experience. The board loved it. The general managers of the bank saw a better way of operating, and more importantly, they saw, here's a guy who has no formal authority, step up and show leadership. So, that won me a certain credibility. So, you need to pick, like Gandhiji's salt march, you have to pick something symbolic that really matters to the organization and show courage and leadership around that. So, that's a judgement call. Again, if you're not listening, you won't know, what that is. You'll just shoot and it may hit or miss.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If I translate that to the work I do, I have found that there is just so much value in understanding the unique context of each Leadership Development situation before coming up with an approach that makes sense. Understanding the culture, the stakeholders, the constraints, the goals and so on. While the underlying approach might not be that different, the nuances often makes or breaks such efforts.

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

Settling into a new context: Figuring out "where to go" is only a part of the challenge for leaders in transition. How you land effectively in a new context is as critical. Hair line cracks often become full blown fractures if not attended to carefully. Leaders talk about some key lessons Individuals could bear in mind as they transition across contexts (Army to Business world, US to India, MNC to Family Business, Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

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

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.

Ravi Venkatesan - Nuggets

- 06.00 Ravi Venkatesan - The Full Conversation
- 06.01 Ravi Venkatesan - Driving social impact
- 06.02 Ravi Venkatesan - Early childhood wiring
- 06.03 Ravi Venkatesan - Career planning 2.0 for graduates
- 06.04 Ravi Venkatesan - Leading in India versus other markets
- 06.05 Ravi Venkatesan - Transitioning from Cummins to Microsoft
- 06.06 Ravi Venkatesan - Listening intently during transitions
- 06.07 Ravi Venkatesan - Picking leaders to invest in
- 06.08 Ravi Venkatesan - Hyper-development of a leader in a startup
- 06.09 Ravi Venkatesan - Executive to non-executive transition
- 06.10 Ravi Venkatesan - Gig economy and careers

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

Podcast Transcript [06.06 Ravi Venkatesan - Listening intently during transitions](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

www.playtopotential.com

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.