



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 right side of the banner is a portrait of Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host' and 'Deepak Jayaraman' below it. At the bottom left, 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

Given the VUCA world we live in, re-inventing oneself every now and then has become a necessity. Nandan talks about the mindset with which he has approached the various transitions he has had in his career and shares his perspective on what it takes for people to play to their potential.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Just a couple of questions to wrap up. If you really reflect on your journey and really think about what has enabled you to reinvent yourself so often and stay relevant and be of value to the wider society, what are the three-four things that you've learnt from your journey?

Nandan Nilekani (NN): I can tell you and everybody may not agree. For example, my wife doesn't agree with my strategy, so it's not obvious that it's like great advice, but let me tell you anyway. One thing is, I never look back. I never look back. So, whenever I embark on a new journey, I say, this is my life from now on. Of course, I'll have very pleasant memories of my previous life, but I am not going to keep harking back. So, that's an important thing: never looking back. My wife says that shows that you are incapable of learning from the past or whatever. It depends on how you view it.

The second thing is that I tend to be an optimist. Again, my wife says I am an irrational optimist. So, I always look at the bright side of things, which is very helpful when you are facing adversity, because you can always figure out some positive thing. But it also can be thought of as a form of denial, that you are not recognizing the problem. I don't know which one it is. I think, this ability of looking forward and being optimistic provides a lot of the emotional drive for me to do new things. I think my willingness to reset my life sometimes, you get too much into a comfort zone and then you don't have the ability to say, OK, let me restart basically because I didn't really start my life with some huge ambition or anything. For me to restart in a completely new direction comes very easily, which actually I find is not that true with most people.

For example, one of the things I am doing now is I am working with this guy, my good friend Sanjeev Agarwal of Helion. We are setting up a scale-up coalition. What I learnt after working with startups for two years is that there are lots of startups but there are very few scale-ups. And scale-ups to me is what we did at Infosys, what Mr. Premji did at Wipro, or what Uday Kotak is doing at Kotak Bank, or what Kiran Majumdar has done at Biocon, or what Sunil Mittal did at Airtel, which is, over 10-20 years, build multi-billion-dollar large enterprises. I think there is an art of doing that, scaling up, and we have been there, done that. I have done it both in the government and in the private sector. So, I am actually creating a pool of capital, a 100-million-dollar fund, of which we are putting a lot of it ourselves and saying, let's work with companies that are ready to scale up and where they have a vision of building companies to last. And we'll help, we'll bring in the right thinking, technology,

leadership development, and maybe coaching from you, whatever. That's a whole new role I am doing. So, I think, I have the advantage that I can enter a new role and be willing to gamble, whatever way the chips fall. So, that's probably another thing which I have and which enables me to do this. Finally, I think, for me, return on my time invested is very important. For me, the biggest opportunity cost is the cost of my time and therefore, I always make sure that whatever I do, there is a high ROTI, return on time invested.

DJ: And what dimensions do you measure the return?

NN: Impact! It should impact people, it should make a change, and it should move the needle on society, those kinds of things.

DJ: In summary, any one or two thoughts for people to play to their potential?

NN: I think, most of us are vastly underplaying our potential. Finally, it's all inside you. It's in your mind, it's in your vision, it's in your value system, and it's in your ability, stamina, to run the race. It's all inside. I think, most people I meet, including myself, are vastly underplaying their potential. So, I think, it's just you've to look inside and the sky is the limit.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The phrase "Sky is the limit" reminded me of something that came up in my conversation with my first podcast guest Vijay Amritraj the tennis legend. When I asked him the same question here is what he said.

VA: *"In one of my interviews, one of my guests on one of my talk shows was the second man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin, who was a friend of mine. I went to interview him at his home in Westwood, in California. You know as you look at all the various accolades like you've seen in people's homes, trophies and plaques and so on, very few things really catch your eye. You go through pictures and you go through this and that. There was one little plaque in a corner that absolutely caught my eye. I've never forgotten it and it always is very much in the back of my mind when I do things. It was stuck in a corner in his living room and it said... you know, how we always tell kids, as you grow up, if you fulfil your potential, the sky is the limit, and everything is always 'sky is the limit'? So, that little plaque said, 'Who said the sky is the limit, when I left my footprints on the moon.'"*

DJ: As Nandan says, it's often the inner journey which makes a big difference in the long run. I hope you found the conversation as energizing and purposeful as I did. Thank you for listening, and I look forward to having you at one of the subsequent conversations of the Play to Potential podcast series. For accessing some of the earlier conversations, please visit PlaytoPotential.com. Bye now.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Vijay Amritraj that is referenced: [In Summary](#).

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In Summary – Playing to potential: This playlist captures the essence of what the speaker is trying to say in their conversation. In a way, it captures the key principles with which they have approached life which has brought them to where they are today. They share their perspectives on the mindset we need to adopt as we navigate through life. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Nandan Nilekani - Nuggets

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- 11.03 Nandan Nilekani - Selecting the right co-founder(s)
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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](#).

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