

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 the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host 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

Transitioning from one path to another is not easy. We often celebrate individuals after they have demonstrated success. But we often miss the iceberg that is below the sea surface. Atul talks about how he persisted through multiple hurdles when he transitioned from studying Chemical Engineering to pursue photography.

## Transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** You briefly spoke about the role of Gautam. Often, a lot of us at key pivotal moments, either knowingly or unknowingly, end up benefiting from a mentor. Talk to us a little bit about what he did for you and more importantly, what does it mean for people in terms of having the right mentors around them?

**Atul Kasbekar (AK):** I started investigating what professional/commercial advertising photography would entail. First of all, when I asked myself the two things that I enjoyed doing, one was writing (and I edited my school magazine called 'Campion Review') and the other was this. And at that time, honestly, the profile of the writer again, mercifully, which has changed was this left-of-centre *jhola*-carrying khadi-clad guy who sat at Samovar when he could afford it and discussed all the problems in the world that he was never going to solve anyway. And the last thing I was going to be was a commie. I will be a capitalist pig till I die, for sure. So, I said, that I can't do. Plus, it seemed like you'd be scrounging around for a living, and that was true at that time. So, I said, I will do the other thing that I enjoyed.

So, then I started investigating more. Wherever you looked at any magazine, there was a by-line. Inevitably, a picture I liked happened to be taken by Gautam. So, I had no idea how to connect with him. I knew nobody in the business in any form. So, I went to the phone directory and he wasn't listed. And Rajadhyaksh is a fairly common surname in Mumbai. So, there is a lot of them, there was like 10–20 pages of them. So, every third or fourth Rajadhyaksh, I would call and confidently say, 'Can I speak to Gautam please?' and they'd say 'wrong number'. So, after must be some 100 phone calls at one rupee a piece or whatever it was at that time, finally, it was some cousin or someone said, this is not his number.

**DJ:** Brute force method?

**AK:** Yeah, yeah! So, I said let's not call each one. Let's just go every fifth, every sixth, and then took a highlighter to mark it done, let's not call this guy again or he slaps me, in case I have to go back to the start. So, every day, I would make 10–20 phone calls. Then, finally, someone gave me the number, which was landline, of course. So, I called him. I said, 'Listen, hi, my name is so and so.'

Please don't hang up. I need two minutes of your time. I was wondering if I can meet you. I would like to know more about what the profession is all about.' So, there's just silence at the other end. 'I am at Lintas. I work there at Express Towers. Come on this date.' I am like, wow, so I am going to meet the great one! So, I go there and meet him and he took a great shine to me and we remained friends, in fact, till he passed away.

All Gautam did actually was give me time. It was more like a patient and a shrink kind of a scenario. It was just a reassurance that it's a respectable profession. It's not the guy who says 'cheese' at a wedding, because, you know, if it's a photographer, that's the first image that came to mind. Are you going to be at weddings saying, 'Sir, *thoda closer*' kind of thing? There is Mitter Bedi and Adrian Steven and this is the kind of stuff they do. I went for one shoot that he was doing with Vilas Bhende and watched one shoot in action. I never really assisted him, hung out with him on one shoot.

**DJ: And this is all when you were pursuing your UDCT degree or you'd decided to move on?**

AK: No. So, this is at the end of the first year and then through that second year period. And then, I just registered at Xavier's just in case my application didn't go through.

And at that time, it was really bizarre. People have no idea how tough it was. There was no provision for you to get official foreign exchange to go for a bachelor's degree abroad. So, now you can go for anything. You couldn't go [then]. So, my dad said I am not doing any hawala nonsense at all. Gaud Saraswat Brahmins rooted from Karwar, they don't do such things. So, he said, you want to go, I have no problem, but you please get an official permit. I am like, how do you expect me to do it. Dad said, now, go figure it out. So, I went to the RBI rule book. They said you can go if you prove that a) the degree is not available in India in a bachelor's program and the second thing is, you have to prove that it is useful for the country. That is so subjective.

Then, I realized that very few people in our country want to take a call and put a letter down that actually has no harm to them, but they don't want to do it, because why take that 1% chance of whatever. So, if you write to Mumbai University and say, give me a letter; I told them this is my problem, you need to tell me that this degree is not available in whatever. They won't give you the letter. So, I said, you don't have it in Mumbai University. They said, no. So, I said why can't you write it and say you don't have it. Then, they thought to themselves and said, OK, I will tell you what, you write to us saying I want to study photography, where in Mumbai University can I do it? And then we will say we have no such course, one line, which is in direct reply to your reply. So, I would have to get that from four–five universities. Now, Mumbai at least you can go there and catch somebody in the office. Get it from Delhi? Good luck! So, I would send letters to them, registered, with a self-addressed stamped envelope inside, just make it easier for you to just slip it in and send it back. Sixteen reminders later! So, I got four–five of those, first of all to prove in India.

Then, I literally went and beat down the doors of every single ad agency, and this is a random stranger walking in 'Sir, please, Mohammad Khan, this is the thing. I have got this. I need the second part, as many documents as I can get from people saying photography will be useful for the country. Please word it in your own way.'

**DJ: And all this is for forex?**

AK: For forex. My dad said you can't go...

**DJ: You got the admit and now, you are trying to organize the forex?**

AK: It wasn't very much. It was like 6000 dollars a year. Then, I must have got literally like 50 letters from various people, every ad agency, and any person.

Actually, I should just tell my kids this. And this is what I mean about safety net. My dad took it away. He said, 'If you want to go, figure it out.' And at that point I said, whatever happens now, I will make this work. I think, to put it into a sense of perspective, I am actually quite shocked now that I think about it. I mean you walked into an enterprise, 'Do you have an appointment?' 'No! Can I meet Mohammad Khan?' 'Seriously?' 'Can I meet Alyque Padamsee?' 'Who are you again?' 'Sir, this is my problem.' This is you are talking to the receptionist, to get past the receptionist whose job is to stonewall you. 'Can I speak to his secretary? Can I write a note? I'll wait.' There goes the day.

DJ: Going back to the Gautam conversation. It wasn't an 'I want a job' conversation. It was a 'let me figure out what this profession is'. It sorts of elevates you, saying that I am here genuinely to find out if this profession makes sense for me. It's interesting that you structure it that way. And from an entrepreneurship standpoint, you are always opening doors much bigger than you. Just having that tenacity to keep knocking.

AK: I think it just bore down from passion. Now, I have seen a couple of shoots, I am pretty certain this is what I want to do, and I have a feeling that I will be good at it. I don't know successful or not, but it's definitely something that I can do, and you then just sort of do it.

I was telling my kids the other day. I met this guy from Rajasthan. He tried very hard to meet with me and I didn't give him time of day. I mean, there was no connection, he just wanted to meet. So, finally, he connected with someone in the office, someone who didn't give him time of day. Then, he connected with one very sweet guy, who basically loves a sob story and he got suckered into coming to me and saying, Sir, I think you should meet this guy. And I said, why? I mean, we are not involved in that thing, message me before, etcetera. He said no, I think, there are some interesting things you could have some synergies. Finally, I met with him. Not a whole lot happened. Essentially, what he was doing was he was selling things like Facebook likes, Instagram followers, and I can get so many views and his thing was that he was selling them to the digital companies who were selling them on to the music companies and production houses. He says you can open all those doors, why don't you get into partnership with me? We can make a lot of money. Here is the money that they are overbilling for things I am doing for them. So, I just said, see, I just find that grotesque, to think that you need to buy these things and say 80 million and so many million views and actually, this is not the case, there are a bunch of bought accounts or whatever. So, I said, I don't want to do it.

But I was telling my kids that the guy can't string three straight sentences in English. He has not let that hamper him. He wants to now open up way bigger doors and he's just not taken no for an answer. I said, now in your line of work, where you have been so mollycoddled along the way and wrapped in cotton wool from your home bubble to your lift bubble, lift bubble to your underground parking bubble to your car bubble. Then, you are fully insulated from the universe and you reach your school bubble, college bubble, airplane bubble. You have just been bubbled through the entire system. And I have jumped railway tracks. I have jumped into running busses. Whatever, no problem. Every person wants a better life for their kids than they had no problem. I am saying, '*Baahar jaake na chaar dhakke khane chahiye*'. Because the brutality when this guy comes into the ring with his fist swinging, you have no chance, because he will chew you and spit you out any day of the week. Because you are just not strong enough and you are not tenacious enough and you are not...

DJ: And he has heard a lot more no's than you, right? So many people have told him no and he has, sort of like you, kept knocking and some door somewhere will open.

AK: Correct. I find these stories quite remarkable. Nothing happened, but the take from this was, he managed to do what he wanted to do, which was get face time. Eventually, he got the time he wanted.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: There were three takeaways for me here.

The first was about the role of resilience in life but especially during key transitions. Whether it was Atul calling each number in the phone book to get to Gautam Rajyadaksha or him trying to arrange documentation for Forex or the anecdote about the individual who by hook or crook got to him with sheer tenacity was fascinating.

The second takeaway was about how one handles a conversation with an expert or a tenured professional in the field. Especially, when you are in transition, it is very tempting to have an "I want a job" conversation. But in my work, I have seen that the smart people have genuine conversations to understand the life in that career and build a good rapport. If there is an opportunity, the person is going to mention it anyways. How you approach that conversation with that expert or mentor often plays a significant role in how the person slots you in their head.

Thirdly, it was interesting to hear his perspectives on how he strikes the balance between providing comfort while ensuring that they have the hunger to survive and succeed in the world they are growing into.

Thank you for listening. For more please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com).

## End of nugget transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

### RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Resilience:** Research by Angela Lee Duckworth (of Wharton) talks about a special blend of passion and commitment that she calls Grit. Leaders from various fields (Armed Forces, Writing, Sport, Entrepreneurship and more) talk about their experiences in cultivating resilience. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Reinventing self:** "How do I stay relevant" is a question that all of us have to grapple with as we go through our respective journeys. Careers aren't linear any more. Some of the leaders talk about how they managed to pivot during their journeys and significantly change trajectories. 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Atul Kasbekar - Nuggets**

- 12.00 Atul Kasbekar - The Full Conversation
- 12.01 Atul Kasbekar - Transitioning from engineering to photography
- 12.02 Atul Kasbekar - Being tenacious through the transition
- 12.03 Atul Kasbekar - Marrying passion with pragmatism
- 12.04 Atul Kasbekar - Staying relevant over the long term
- 12.05 Atul Kasbekar - Entrepreneurial pursuits beyond photography
- 12.06 Atul Kasbekar - Balancing commerce with creativity
- 12.07 Atul Kasbekar - Enlisting and empowering people in your team
- 12.08 Atul Kasbekar - In Summary - Playing to Potential

### **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.

Podcast Transcript [12.02 Atul Kasbekar - Being tenacious through the transition](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

[www.playtopotential.com](http://www.playtopotential.com)