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## Context to the nugget

Vishy talks about how his approach to development has changed as he has grown as a player over time. He talks about his approach to picking Coaches that get the best out of him. He also discusses the impact of technology on what it takes to be a successful player while getting the most out of the machines. He talks about the trade-off between specialization and flexibility in this context.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** *If you can reflect on your journey, let's say for a minute I pick GM as a point you were GM by the time you were 17 I think, just to take that as an example when you became World Champion, talk to us a little bit about, how your approach to growth has changed?*

**Viswanathan Anand (VA):** We have found that a chess players tend to be good in certain things, the obvious connection you would make is are they good in mathematical things, because Chess looks like very logical, mathematical game, are they good in scientific, I would say yes, chess players are probably slightly over represented in those fields but I know many chess players, excellent in Languages as well, what I think chess players are really good at is looking at a lot of information and working with those patterns so wherever these pattern tend to be useful so in things like financial trading a lot of chess players moved into those fields, because it looks very similar to this flood of new games from which you try to draw conclusion and this flood of data about anything and you work with that, it trains you to focus on one subject and stand that subject till you have gotten an answer, and these are things that happened unconsciously over the chess board and you will carry over these skills elsewhere, I was quite surprised when I was in my early twenties because it was clear to me that I was going to make a living as a chess player, I found a lot of my junior colleagues and all dropping out, they would become a Grand Master then couple of years later they wouldn't be so active for a while and then couple of years later they could turn out and they will become Bankers, far few a Lawyer, Bankers, again you can see this, they could go for a traditional career but not that traditional, something like trading suits the chess mentality, and they always said that one of the biggest strength for people or chess player who have got poker as well, all of them usually said that one of the things that chess taught them was objectivity, so this idea that opposition is only what it is, if you played well until that time your position is good, if you played badly until that time your position is not good, so they were surprised how many people in poker for instance just trading just felt lucky and did this or that and for chess players, if my past moves were good then I will have a good position, and this ides was almost like good and bad, if you would played well them you would have a good position there was almost a kind of justice supplying there, and they said that made them very strong they tend it not to get emotional, in another way even though they wouldn't feel where could gamble they tend it not to gamble or only gamble when they really felt the arts was favouring them or that sort of thing so gamble when the position was the desperate so

there was Indian influence that thought in a certain way but also like the many chess players you get into research because again the university side up things where you get used to, chess players generally are comfortable with the other chess players, I think it's wrong to say but they don't the social skills but there are certain kinds of social things, there are that certain situations they come from in, what you associate with nerdiness I mean it's an over use to word probably, and so chess players gravitate naturally to those environments, very controlled setting because chess is a game played with a quite rigid rules so you tend to gravitate toward settings like that, and they feel uncomfortable in areas like entrepreneurship and so on because that calls for a totally different kind of a skill set so, I find that far more chess players and these kinds of things than that, though perhaps the chess players who know bit about coding might straddle this world.

**DJ: Back to your journey Vishy, if we go back to becoming GM, did your approach to preparation or your approach to your game changed significantly? What changed at that point in time?**

VA: I would say that as I climbed hire in the chess world I realize that there were some skills that I was lacking, so I started to work seriously with the trainer before my first candidates match this is the candidates cycle for the world championship and that's when I was first started to work with a trainer, and that's interesting because for the first time you don't just have an idea and you go to a board, you are actually trying to impose some discipline on the process by which you can come up with the new ideas, because in chess everything that's new gets old very fast, so it's a stream of ideas, fifty years ago it was very slow, then it kept speeding up and now with computers and the internet it spread up insanely, but none the less, the first time you work with the trainers, you learn that there are totally different opinions and perspectives to yours you realize that there are strong people who argue strongly for the moves you didn't see, and you try to learn from that and then when I won my first match and I qualified to play I worked with the Russian player again the idea was I could benefit from the Russian training methods because they were the most sophisticated and advanced in this area, I would say most recently I have had to learn and somehow reorient my style towards spontaneity and creativity again, essentially almost back to where I came from because I over prepare and then you need to rebalance that, so I think the big change was clearly in my twenties when I first started working with trainers and suddenly chess is the very structured thing and that was the big change for me.

**DJ: How people pick trainers or coaches in the corporate world, having worked with different players, what have you learnt in terms of picking good trainers or coach from the wisdom of your journey?**

VA: I would say this is quite easy because when you pick someone to be close to especially as a chess player, I mean in a corporate environment there are some buffers between you and the next person, so if you don't like someone you still get to go home and he goes home and you don't have to see him for a day and there are also the other people at the office there are buffers but in chess it's much more raw because, if you don't get along with your trainer then you are really stuck with the each other, it's almost marriage like for that duration, so the first thing is you must get along well with these people and I think it's very useful to have who disagree with you because they will challenge you, your view points or trainers good in the area you are weaken, I mean you may be a better player than that overall, but that may mean you are good in seven areas and they are good in three areas and those three areas are your weak, so you can still learn from some of who's weaker than you in competitive chess but not necessarily in training or understanding of chess, that's the mix I tried to idea to letter on I found that even though there are some people I really like I genuinely like them as friends that they were reinforcing unhealthy qualities in me so if like I am cautious on certain situations and I am trying to break out to that the last thing I need is trainer who is cautious there as well, because you will tend to reinforce to the bad habits so you should also see, what it is

you are trying to learn exactly a trend achieved with that training camp, I would say subsequently there are people who are friend of mine but who also they have certain quirks that would make you uncomfortable all day but I found that that can be healthy too people who leave you slightly unsettled the whole day well, I found that sometimes my work is better as a result, there might moments you are annoyed with them and you work harder, or something like that so I would say, you should be focused on getting along and second is an openness to receive ideas and third to question you're working wise, when my trainer first started to disagree with me the first reaction is from your ego, your first reaction is that's my idea and you said it's not good I am going to sit and defend my idea but if you can lose that and think well why do I have these trainers at all? And then you think well let me see if there idea is good or not and let me argue this based on the objectivity, then you can learn something, so it's important to have to be able to watch yourself from above sort of speak have a perspective and whether you are learning something at least in a narrow environment like a Chess, then it should really be about people you can see yourself spending couple of weeks with.

DJ: If you look at the distraction of the technology in chess, just from a preparation and scaling up point of view or from a development stand point how has technology fundamentally, plot out your approach to scaling up as a chess player.

VA: The first technological intervention into chess first came in the late 80s when databases started to come, so already the people who are good in indexing information and who could organize information in a certain way, these were people who knew how to take all the games that are being published, index them and they are able to immediately find, retrieve the information they were looking for, even a librarian who doesn't have only skills you think they have, what they have is they know enough about the subject that they able to look forward their need, and if they don't know, the subject pattern very well they will still be able to find what an expert will able to find, so when computers came along suddenly the people who was good in chess because of this, started to fall back of it, because their skills wasn't the most relevant here, if I know how to search field well, I could find whatever I want for that subject, then the second trend which came was that the chess playing program was started to appear, these are very weak chess playing programs and in the beginning they would go like four or five moves in every direction there were thorough but that's all what they could do, you tend to anything that a grand master would say into the future, who tend to be more accurate than what they did, but they were very good at essentially that was the very basic calculators you use them to eliminate little errors, then as slowly they start to get better, so the kind of calculations they could check for you improve a little better and they improved a little bit more, and then this deep Lou match happened but Deep Lou was very special because it was running very specialized hardware, which couldn't be recreated for anyone, so even though Deep Lou existed and in theory this machine existed somewhere in the world which was stronger than chess players, it didn't affect you right away whereas now if there is computer which is stronger than everyone the chances are they will let you use on the internet, that delivery mechanism splayed and exist back that but right after the Deep Lou I would say within a couple of years maybe three four years in the max, your Laptop became stronger than you, which means it will beat you in any single game that it plays, but you may make a better move here and there over the computer but over a game it would make fewer mistakes than you did and tend to win and what has happened subsequently because now these programs are just run the course but it is the same essential process, we have had to withdraw we would have to consist space to the computers so they got better in this, they got better in that and then they got better in that, and first they got better in the things that you thought computers are good at, but then they started getting better in things that we thought we are good at, such as, long term calculations, judgement, intuition, so to be generally think of intuition is something slightly long term process, and so if I make a move and the reason for

that move is ten moves down the line you were tend to associate with the intuition well computers got good in that as well, they started making long term sacrifices long term plans, which turned out to be very good because their search depth was increasing so they were hitting further and further, there is nothing intelligent about these things, then it turned out chess is again that can be, that is perfect for that because very strict rules and an environment where they thrive, so at first we considering space when we moving along, but eventually it becomes a tool because as computers gets stronger and stronger, anybody who consoles them can benefit from the information, so what differentiates a chess player from another starts to change a lot, and suddenly if you are adapting your way of working you find yourself even players who are much weaker than you are neutralizing you, because they are using the computer to cover their weaknesses, so this is a regular chess, the thing is if I want to play an opening today against some player, and he prepares three lines with the computer and he checks them precisely and they he comes back and plays the game against you, how you even could improve on it? Even you are very good in that area even if your intuitions are very good, if he is worked it out, he is worked it out, so that became a problem, so as the computer becomes more stronger and stronger you change your work methods, that involves getting out of your ego because what worked five years ago just no long for work and you have to just get redetect I mean your working method, I am talking about, and that more and less where we are driven to today, and now a days it's almost extreme, people who have adapted themselves to, I mean computers are now so strong they find in seconds or may be minutes what it takes us to couple of weeks to find, that's the speed of calculation, so what do you do is no longer makes any sense to specialize in anything because a guy was never see that opening will be able to catch up with you in one week, so now a days most modern chess players are incredibly flexible, they are able to switch in that and they play everything what they specialized and what they don't specialized they move around a lot, and it's becoming about not what you bring to the table but what you remember, can you organize this new flood of information in a different way? And what keeps you stronger? And then you shift your skills further and further into the end game and the battle game because it's harder for the computer to be prepared at all that way.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of things struck me here. First is the piece where Vishy talks about what careers chess players are possibly suitable for and what they aren't suitable for. It was interesting to see him abstract the key themes from the context in a chess playing game (things such as fixed set of rules, taking in a lot of data, objectivity required in decision making) and applying that to different canvases to say where these capabilities could be of value. Places like Poker, Derivatives and so on.

The reason I mention it is that people often attach too broad a label to themselves either using Industry or Function and that often restricts them when they think about what next. It's worth abstracting some of the common underlying themes of the career you are in and then see where those skill-sets could and mind-sets are of value. That's an interesting way of thinking about a transition.

The other piece that struck me was Vishy mentioning the notion of Flexibility in the context of how humans can be relevant in a world where the machines are getting exponentially smarter over time. It is an interesting and a possibly scary time where we need to ensure we don't get into the super-specialization trap where we lose sight of the broader trends and find ourselves irrelevant a few years down the line.

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## End of nugget transcription

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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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