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Context to the nugget

People often talk about Work-Life Balance and the rhetoric is often around “Life” being the residual figure after work has consumed you. Mouli flips this argument around and says that there is a lot to be gained on the work front by organizing your “life” carefully. He talks about passionate striving hobbies that push you towards excellence at work and also talks about how some of the social impact initiatives he pursues enhance his empathy when he is at work.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Mouli, how do you think about the notion of Work and Life and the interplay between them?

Chandramouli Venkatesan (CV): The context that I mentioned which is the whole game of work life and what I have heard continuously in the corporate world is a work life conversation is a one way street the traffic flows from only one way which is work to life and the only thing we discuss is what are the impact of work on life? My belief and what I have written in Catalyst is the impact of work on life is lesser that the impact of life on work and fundamentally let's take a anecdote there was an anecdote of Albert Einstein who goes on to says in his biography that he believes that he was a great Physicist and a Scientist because he played a lot of Violin in his life and he believes that helped him be a great Physicist and Scientist just an anecdote on what you do in your life but if you were to bring it down to you and me to succeed in work for example you have to be a good team player, now imagine somebody who has played a lot of team sports in their life what we call is life does it have some bearing on how they will be as a team player had worked? Now this doesn't mean you can't be a good team player if you haven't played team sports but I am just linking and saying the stuff you do in your life has bearing on your work and hence the question is can you design your life? Now all this is happening by accident, Einstein happen to be born in a family who has western classical passion, his mother started teaching him violin at the age of 4, if he had been born in some other family maybe he would not have learnt violin, maybe you and me wouldn't have played team sport best on our, so these happens by accident, what we do in our life happens by accident suppose if we were have to turn it around and were to say that I want to live my life and design my life in a certain way which enhances my probability of success at work what would I do? Would I actively play more team sports? It not only gives me sports and health that benefits but that also helps me to do something else. Would I actively choose to pursue certain hobbies and I have a chapter on passionate striving hobbies as I call it Passionate and Striving being the key qualifiers and pursuing those hobbies that did help me at work. Would I actively seek to do some kind of social missions? Which improves my understanding of human behaviour and people and raises my empathy and my listening which makes me a better leader?

DJ: Talk to us about some of the choices that you have made on the life front which you think has positively impacted the work front?

CV: Two or three aspects of my life have definitely contributed to work. The first is the passionate hobbies again by accident I ended up running marathons and in my HR days I was trying to get people in company to run marathons and I said I have to lead from the front so I said I will also enrol and run marathons and then I started playing golf and both marathons and golf, these are what I called as striving sports there's tremendous striving you are not kind of running a marathon for pleasure, you are kind of running a marathon to get better you are fighting against yourself to get better. The primary game you are playing is not to beat somebody else but to say how do I get better? And I think some of these does that, I think often in our careers we often end up in a module where we are saying we are trying to win which is different from an orientation of how do I get better? In a marathon you don't try to win, you try to get better, once you built that kind of an orientation let's say in a striving hobby, where you say I am trying to get better you bring that orientation into your career, where you say I am no longer trying to win which is about beating somebody and being better but I am going to trying to get better in what I do? So I saw that shift in me, tremendously where I have moved from trying to somebody who was trying to win to saying I must do everything better. I think the other thing of my life which severely impacted me was some of my social pursuits and again happened by accident but I got into it by depth and I was involved in a few social projects which was around certain villages where we were trying to develop some communities and I think there was some suppressed human side in me in the early part of my career where I was just trying to be an achiever and I think the social pursuits really brought out the human side in me and I will say there is the world there are human beings and they need to be human and I think it's tremendously impacted by leadership I think I would have been a very poor leader if I had not gone on that social messages.

DJ: In what ways? If you could expand on what's the nature of osmoses you see from the life to work? Specifically, on this point around influencing your leadership?

CV: I think the few areas, first and foremost I think the concept of empathy its widely spoken poorly practiced and I think the challenge is partly around individuals challenge also work context, when you are pushing people for results it's difficult to be empathetic and often empathy is confused with accepting poor results I think the empathy is in sitting in that chair and say how can I help you for results? But I think the concept of empathy I got a lot more and to say how do you push for results I am not going to lower my push for results but how can I understand you better to help you push for your results, I think the empathy was something which came from there. I think the second thing which came from some of my social pursuits was the fact that we are human being and there is tremendous amoebic, organic quality to human being and if you tend to over structure and over complicate which is often driven by your need to be in control you don't necessarily get to results and you have got to feel more comfortable for the osmotic amoebic process to take place and hence shifting from control and managing to shifting to managing through purpose and through vision and saying people will find their way of getting there as well so those are some impacts that social piece had of me.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am a big fan of the work of Stewart Friedman at Wharton who talks about looking at life across 4 buckets (Self, Work, Home and Community). He goes onto say that smart leaders find ways of undertaking initiatives that tick multiple boxes and integrate the four rather than deal with them as discrete buckets.

One my earlier guests Meher Pudumjee (MP), Chairperson of Thermax spoke about her passion for music and why she preferred Singing in Choir rather than playing the Piano:

MP: "I started with piano when I was seven and along the way came choir and I thoroughly enjoy singing, not individually but in a group it's a fantastic group and I love being with people whom agile with and think alike or we have the similar interest and this is one of them and I find that quire is almost like a meditation in some ways it's taking you away from the humdrum of life and our conductors is one who has always believed in explaining to us what the words that we are singing mean and that is made a big difference in terms of if you know if there is a purpose to the way you are singing to what you are singing the music sounds enormously better than if you are just singing the words and I think the same thing is for business"

DJ: Personally speaking, I learn the guitar on the weekends and the way my guitar teacher coaches me gives me cues around how I could get better at the coaching work I do. I am a firm believer in the integrated notion of life and how one domain influences the other.

Thank you for listening. If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to YouTube and type "PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017". I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. From people such as Zia Mody, Nandan Nilekani, Viswanathan Anand, Vijay Amritraj, Amish Tripathi, Vinita Bali and the like. For more, please visit playtopotential.com where the content is organized by nuggets and they are tagged by themes so that you could get perspectives from multiple individuals on a topic that you care about. If you want to listen offline say during a car ride home or during airplane travel, you could also access the Podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn and several other podcast apps but that may not give you the flexibility to navigate across speakers by theme. If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Meher Pudumjee that is referenced: [Music and Leadership](#).

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Pursuing your passion: "Follow your heart" is an advice that is commonly doled out to individuals that are trying to make career choices. However, the reality is little more nuanced. People who have followed their heart talk about how they have weaved it into their lives or in some cases, how they have been pragmatic about taking the plunge. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Chandramouli Venkatesan - Nuggets

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- 28.02 Chandramouli Venkatesan - Turbocharging your growth - TMRR
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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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