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## Context to the nugget

Vinay talks about Narasimha Rao spent his time at various points in his career. More specifically, he breaks down the pie chart of time across different phases - when you are campaigning, when you are in power and when you are in opposition. He talks about how Narasimha Rao had unfettered curiosity that helped him indulge his curiosity when he was in opposition which helped him evolve as a person but also ensured that he did not make any hasty decisions in the short-term out of anxiety that would hurt him in the long run.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): How leaders spend time? What there pie chart looks like, when you analyse his diaries, appointment diaries when he was in power and if you had to draw a pie chart do you have the sense of what the big segments are?

Vinay Sitapati (VS): I can give you a morning Upma to night Raagi story but I don't think that's what you care about. I think politician you have to put them in three categories when it comes to time first is during election campaign election campaigns are really these movements that galvanise parties, money pours in if you go to any party office and there's no elections the party office is dead, if fact I once visited a party office in a district I don't want to name when between elections they would basically make it into a Sabji Mandi they could get rent out of the office because no activity takes place around elections so when around elections politicians are very different and that's when they really come to them the mass politicians really come to themselves they are traveling intensively, they are meeting hundreds of people, money is pouring in so I think that's one phase, phase two is when they are in government and that is a routine which moves between so when they are in government they are typically not spending any time in their constituency but the time in government moves between constantly dealing with file like files files and signing files and files moving up and moving down, it's a daily job of a politician and between meeting people, they are constantly meeting people, and a lot of time meeting a minister and meeting a prime minister is an end in itself so you will have like the secretary to Dalai Lama coming and wasting your time for an hour and you have to do it its lets important you can forbid off to a junior minister but otherwise you have to do it so in many ways the prime minister of India is not just an executive head it's also a titular head so there's no shortage of people, the martyrs of Indian independence association will call you for lunch, you have got to show up there if you don't go it will be taken as a slight so I think that's two but the main thing politician in government does is fire fighting and contrary to this view government of India or any government functions perfectly you are there and every morning you wake up reading a newspaper typical and that's where you get your information and there's a new crisis and you have got to figure out how to react to it so I think the key especially in the Indian government the state capacity is being what it is, is you are frequently dealing with problems not of

your making and which no one is warned you about and you have got to react very quickly so I think that's broadly what the day looks like if you are in power and when you are in opposition you actually have a tonne of time, so some politicians take to painting others take to hanging around making your way through the opposition party so I think when you are in opposition it's a different game Narsimha Rao luckily had a tonne of hobbies, he knew how to paint, he knew how to write he was constantly learning languages so he wasn't making foolish mistakes when in opposition. To give you an example arguably the greatest politicians Maharashtra has produced is the guy called YB Chavan who in a non-dynastic party could have been a Prime minister of India, so again I may have got the facts wrong you just check that but in 1977 when Indira Gandhi loses very badly and the Janta government comes to power if my memory serves YB Chavan makes the mistake of rebelling it's a problem because Indira Gandhi backs three years later and YB Chavan is now a rebellious man. Narsimha Rao could have also rebelled because everybody at that time was writing Indira Gandhi's political obituary, what does he do? He drives his own car to Jawaharlal University enrolls in this Spanish language department and learns Spanish and often politics it's a marathon race not a sprint you have to realize that in the lean periods you shouldn't make stupid decisions and the fact that Narsimha Rao had interest outside of politics meant that he wasn't morning to evening asking himself how do I get to power? And that prevented him making short term beneficial decisions that would prove catastrophic in a long term.

**DJ: And was there a certain theme to the curiosity or was it just unfettered curiosity?**

I think it was unfettered, I have so many stories read where he sees a motor pump and he wants to figure out how it works, then head of the nuclear program the man who appointed Abdul Kalam the guy called VS Arunachalam went to meet NR to when he became prime minister to talk about the nuclear program NR wanted a drawing about what the bomb looks like where is the uranium kept just a simple map so I think he was just he fundamentally wanted to figure out how things work and that coupled with the fact that he didn't have a narrow experience he had such a wide range he was defence minister, he was education minister, he was foreign minister he was even Hindu endowment minister in charge of temples in Andhra Pradesh he was chief minister, he was prime minister gave him a really unique sense of how to apply your curiosity to very different fields and I think there's a lesson therefor for people outside politics, if you want to rise to the top know how different parts of your organization work or you should have at least the working knowledge so if you are a CA by training you shouldn't have a finance sense of the organization even if that's your core competency you should have some sense about how different parts of your organization work because at the very top you have to have some sense of that.

**DJ: Where NR got the strength, what made him resilient?**

VS: So it's hard to say because, so I can talk about his family and his growing up but there's a part of a human being that, two plus two in human being is not always four so you might think of your best friend or somebody you know very well, you think you know them very well and you think that you understood the components that made the person but then they surprise you. To give you another example of his resilience or shall I say his ability to surprise me was that he was the lifelong economic protectionist one thing he didn't know much about and he was the protectionist he didn't believe in opening the economy he was very suspicious of capitalists but when he becomes prime minister in June 1991 and he realized the scale of the economic crisis within two or three days he has changed his mind 180 degrees and that's remarkable and it's not something I tried very hard to find out is it because his father treated him in some way is it because he was served in a and I think that's useful as a biographer and trying to understand human beings but sometimes human beings surprise you and that his resilience, his slight tangent to power, it's not easy to explain is it his inherent curiosity is it the fact that he sees himself as a scholar or is it which I believe the most likely

explanation, he has interest other than power he like to paint, he like to learn other languages, towards end of his life he wanted to ward off arthritis to his hands so he learnt to play the piano so he found meaning in things other than the immediate interest in power I think that is partly what gave him tangential view of power that greatly contributed to his understanding of it to use the old ZEN phrase he was in this world but not of it so NR was in politics but he was not of it.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The key takeaway for me was the point around unfettered curiosity that Vinay talks about. In the complex world we live in, I do think the leaders of today and tomorrow need to have depth in a certain space but equally they need to have a working appreciation of a range of things across domains for them to lead their subordinates effectively. In my earlier organization, EgonZehnder, when we would look for Long Term Potential, we would look for 4 things in a Leader – Curiosity (growth mindset, learning orientation and open-ness to feedback), Insight (ability to connect the dots across disparate canvases), Engagement (people connect), Resilience (ability to deal with tough situations and grind through day in and day out). But even within these 4, the primary variable we looked for was Curiosity. And as we move to a digital age where that are so many moving pieces, learnability possibly has a greater premium than what you have already learnt and the capabilities you have built so far. This requires a very different mind-set in terms of how you think about allocating time to various things you do. And I do think it makes sense to think about learning across the science and the arts end of the spectrum. Walter Isaacson, the author of the book Da Vinci talks about how he was able to marry a scientific bent of mind with a heart of an artist to produce what he did. The future CEO is possibly going to need to take a leaf out of that book to be relevant.

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. 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. Google has recently launched an app for podcast listening on Android platforms too. If you went to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com), you would also have the opportunity to listen to multiple voices curated by a topic.

To give you a sense, one of the playlists is Resilience. Guests talk about how they cultivated resilience and dealt with pockets of turbulence that they hit in their journeys.

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## End of nugget transcription

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**Managing time:** Money is a renewable resource, time is not. Leaders share their wisdom around how they have thought about their time and gravitated towards initiatives that yield the maximum Return on Time Invested (ROTI). They also discuss how the pie chart of time has evolved with changes in context. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**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](#).

**Curiosity:** "A Curious Mind" by Brian Grazer (Oscar winning Producer of movies like A Beautiful Mind and Apollo 13) was the inspiration behind the Play to Potential Podcast. In this playlist, Leaders reflect about the role of curiosity and how it has helped them in their journeys. As Alvin Toffler says, the Illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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## Vinay Sitapati - Nuggets

- 30.00 Vinay Sitapati - The Full Conversation
- 30.01 Vinay Sitapati - Early career choices - Law, Journalism, Teaching and Writing
- 30.02 Vinay Sitapati - Delivering good judgments
- 30.03 Vinay Sitapati - The reflection habit - decoding signal from the noise
- 30.04 Vinay Sitapati - Managing time, unfettered curiosity and resilience
- 30.05 Vinay Sitapati - Leadership under extreme constraints - Lion, Fox and Mouse
- 30.06 Vinay Sitapati - Staying relevant through transitions
- 30.07 Vinay Sitapati - Assembling an effective team
- 30.08 Vinay Sitapati - Making/Not making key decisions
- 30.09 Vinay Sitapati - Driving change when there is short term pain and long term gain
- 30.10 Vinay Sitapati - 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](#).

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