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## Context to the nugget

Vinay talks about how Narasimha Rao stayed relevant through the various transitions that he went through in his journey. He also talks about how he learns and grows when he did not get a transition wrong. He also talks about how Narasimha Rao re-invented himself when Congress moved from the Indira Gandhi phase to the Rajiv Gandhi where the core group had several people from an Oxbridge background (far from Narasimha Rao's comfort zone).

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): How did NR reinvent himself?

Vinay Sitapati (VS): I think it was just great skill, let's begin with the first big transition when he moves as a freedom fighter, he begins his career as freedom fighter which in Telangana meant being both anti British and anti-Nizam and he moved from that to being a congress politician and immediately moved from being somebody who is freedom fighter to a Nehruvian socialist who believes in the power of the state he is a socialist he understands how to play with the faction that there are these different factions, it's not that India was given freedom with this united group and they remain united because the moment the British leave the congress party begins to fight with each other and he gets that very well, he understands that is his first transition and he does it very well the second big transitions is which he fails is when he becomes chief minister he thinks he was rewarded by Indira Gandhi because he is the socialist he is going to be a socialist, he is going to bring about land reforms he doesn't realize that he is being made chief minister because he is a puppet because he doesn't have power because he is not going to threaten Indira Gandhi and he pushes radical land reforms there's a push back Indira Gandhi feel threatened and sacks him so I think that's the transition he gets wrong, luckily for him he has the ability to introspect and learn from that fail transition that he had to move from being a socialist politician to a supplicant of Indira Gandhi he fails to understand that and then he soon back and for the decade and the half he was the supplicant of the Nehru Gandhi first Indira Gandhi and then Rajeev Gandhi and he makes that transition very soon smoothly whereas people like Pranab Mukherji and PC Alexander they were very close to Indira Gandhi simply failed to be that close to Rajeev Gandhi, Narasimha Rao was able to do that and then his final transition which is that from being a Nehru Gandhi supplicant he has made prime minister of India he really comes to his own he really becomes his own man he really stops responding to Sonia Gandhi, stops listening to her that's why they don't like each other so I think his ability to understand political context was phenomenal many of his transitions was accurate he understands when he is moving from one ecosystem to the other where he failed to understand in 1973 for example which is why he sacked as chief minister for Andhra Pradesh he has the ability to introspect on it to create a new Avatar and then he is back in business.

DJ: I was talking about new Avatar you also alluded to the cultural shift especially when we are talking about the Rajeev Gandhi era the ox bridge kind of culture that sort of existed in the core group and NR given his background from AP charisma of a dead face talk to us about how he was able to fit into different cultures.

VS: There is the very good story I have in the book on exactly this which is that, the Rajeev Gandhi era he was called Mr. clean Indian loved him they actually thought he was break from his mother so he surrounds himself with the people who are educated “in the modern sense” they have gone to Doon school they have gone to Oxford, they have gone to Cambridge they have private sector experience people like Arun Nehru or Arun Singh people who are his school buddies like Manishankar Iyer his pilot friends like Satish Sharma these are people who are far remove from the kind of vernacular deliberately in India we describe as Hindi speaking type world of NR as far as can be, NR wears a dhoti English is a fifth language he has learnt he likes basically when he is doing nothing he will cross his legs and he will massage his toes in public these are things which happen in village they don't happen in Doon school or Oxbridge. NR was also 65 in 1985 Rajeev Gandhi looking for younger people and older people close to mummy or the way around and NR at this point he's defence minister but he realises his time is up he overhears Rajeev Gandhi to friend of his that we need to remove import restrictions on computer peripherals but the old fogies in my cabinet won't understand and to give you some context the personal computer revolution has come to the united states only in the late 1970 and this is 1985 this is a 65 years old dhoti clad man and this is India the next day after NR hears Rajeev Gandhi telling this to friend of his about old fogies are not understanding NR calls up his son in Hyderabad and says what is this computer piece send me a sample so next day Indian Airline flight from Hyderabad a computer sent to his house in 9 Motilal Nehru marg, NR goes to Dariyaganj in old Delhi to get books on Computer peripherals he hires a master to teach him and within that year and the next he learn Cobol basic two computer languages and can code in the operating system UNIX, its remarkable I mean imagine a 65 year old man doing that today and it's a perfect example of his curiosity and his political survival skill coming just together and not only that he learnt computer he then becomes very close to Rajeev Gandhi as close to Rajeev Gandhi as he was to Indira he becomes foreign minister again he is the first HRD minister the education minister of India and he is very close to Rajeev Gandhi and don't forget Rajeev Gandhi's widow Sonia who appoints him Prime Minister of India he gets that close so I think that it tell you something about that man who understands transitions and understands the context behind transition.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The notion of a 65 year old seasoned politician learning COBOL, Basic and UNIX is just mind-boggling whichever way one looks at it. I do think, given the pace of change around us, learning to learn is almost as important as the inventory of what we have learnt. If this is a topic of interest, you might like the Book – Disrupt Yourself by Whitney Johnson. She takes the framework of Disruptive Innovation that Clayton Christiansen talks about and applies it to the realm of self-development. She talks about the need for all of us to get on to some sort of an S curve of learning where the pace of change is initially gradual but over time it accelerates and the climb is steep but after a while it tapers off and you need to find the next S curve after that.

In a demanding world with aggressive targets, making time for some of these long-term initiatives is a challenge indeed but it has possibly become essential for survival and for being relevant in the ever-changing talent market place.

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 Reinventing Self. Leaders across disciplines have spoken about how they thought about staying relevant and made choices along the way

If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it. Thank you for listening.

## End of nugget transcription

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### RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**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](#).

**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](#).

**Leadership Transitions:** Perspectives around moving from one role from another especially while moving from Functional Leadership to General Management; Leaders also talk about how they thought about inter-generational transition as business owners. 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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