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## Context to the nugget

Herminia speaks about the distinction between Identity Work and Identity Play and speaks about how we should think about crafting experiments where we can play around with our identity authentically rather than going down the “fake it till you make it” path. She re-iterates that how we show up is as critical as what we do.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to a different theme Herminia you talk about identity work and identity play and I loved the term identity play and you talk about how play often freeze you from the authenticity trap again I found that distinctively insightful in the context of how people transition s if you could elaborate in that?

Herminia Ibarra (HI): So a big part of transitioning as a leader is not just about your skill set, a lot of it is also about your style and how you do things and how you show up and how you communicate how you come across to people in those things are a little bit closer to our sets of identity in a sense of authentic leadership so there are little bit scarier to think about altering, playing and experimenting because it's not about I don't know using a different tool it's about being a different kind of person. So for example you know people who try to learn how to communicate with more personally with personal story or with more emotion or people who try to move towards more of a coaching leadership style and they feel like they are not doing anything at all because you are not driving the conversation or the results and so it's a trigger it's not authentic this isn't me and when you feel this isn't me you don't do it it's really aversive to feel like a fake. So you don't you would rather be wrong and not be successful being yourself then actually be yourself I mean get it right but it doesn't feel like it who you are and so that the real dilemma for a lot of people and I saw a lot in my research you know people who need to network up to stakeholders who are more senior in their organization for a lot of people that feels selling out, not merry to credit, political, using people just wrong. So, what do you do because you are stuck between your sense of who you are and your sense of what it takes to succeeding you are stuck? So my point here is that it doesn't the fake it till you make it doesn't work it only work if that's what you are aspired to be. But in a lot of cases you don't aspire to be that you kind of think it's a shaky and so all you can do is say you know what being authentic doesn't have to contempt me to being as I always have been. Obviously what I am doing is not working I am gone give myself license to deviate to play around the little bit with possibilities and then I'll see I'll gauge it, I'll evaluate it and if it's really not right for me I don't have to stick to it I am not committing to being that person but I am at least committing to trying something totally outside my comfort zone and see based on my own experiences if I can tweak it if I can make it my own but I'm gone at least try something else.

DJ: And may be just an example to bring this to life Herminia somebody like senior leader who embarked to this journey?

HI: So I was just with the whole bunch of senior people in big oil and gas company and they are all trying to figure out how do they lead in a more personal way and how can they communicate in a way that makes the message more personal more compelling to people actually we are just having the same conversation with the group of executives from the car maker Renault here on campus and that's for board been always very data driven and by the numbers that feels almost hooky, manipulative, trying to follow recipe and it's just really hard to get themselves to does it feel nitro but they understand that when it's done well and from the heart it touches people. You know we were watching a video of Satya Nadella talking about his own life and what it taught him and everybody universally admires it when it's real and genuine but they just don't know how to do it themselves they have to work out to get to that point for themselves and they are working out it period in between is feels awkward so that were the identity play in the identity work come in and if you feel like you are having to work at it that means it's more impression management. Whereas if you feel like you are kind of playing at different possibilities for who you might become you give yourself a little bit more permission because you are gone try different things is not necessarily going to be all the same you can deviate and see what happens.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If I take my example for whatever its worth, when I was a search consultant with EgonZehnder, I realized that I was over-indexing on candidate conversations and gravitated towards having conversations around guiding them in their journeys. Those conversations gave me energy and I felt people saw the value. In an Executive Search context, I realized that the primary deliverable was to have a sound judgment on candidates and to help clients recruit people. Helping individuals with their careers was supposed to be a footnote conversation.

At some point, I decided to lean into this aspect and said why don't I make this my primary activity and see I get the work and play circles to converge. As, one of my friends said, I felt I had more of a coaching mind-set than a poaching mind-set and I decided to explore the adjacent possible to Executive search, which is Transition Advisory – what I do now. I feel strongly about the notion of adjacent possible, which is evaluating what is around you at the fringes of what you do today but might be aligned with your values and emerging identity.

Thank you for listening. For more podcast content, please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com). The website also has content organized by specific themes in the Curated Playlists section. Given you are listening to this podcast; you might specifically find the themes Reinventing yourself and Navigational principles relevant.

The Playlist reinventing yourself is about leaders who were at inflection points who were courageous to try different things and move into a new context. This includes Amish Tripathi speaking about how he moved from a career in Financial Services to writing, Roopa Kudva moving from CRISIL to Omidyar Network, Papa CJ speaking about moving from Management Consulting to Stand up, Nandan Nilekani moving from Infosys to the UID project and to politics, Atul Kasbekar moving from being a Photographer to a Producer, Devdutt Pattanaik moving from Healthcare to Mythology and so on. Hopefully the diversity of perspectives will provoke your thinking around how to navigate the transition.

The Playlist Navigational Principles gives you a flavour of the frameworks that various people used to deal with the various inflection points. In a world with more divergent pathways than before, the quality of the steering wheel is possibly as important if not more important than the quality of the engine we have in our car. This playlist gives you some thought starters which will help you build a more robust steering wheel for yourself.

You can access these playlists in the Curated Playlists section at [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com). And to know more about the Leadership and Transition Advisory work I do, please visit the About section at [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com). Bye now.

## End of nugget transcription

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**Identity:** Identity refers to the reputation, characteristics etc. of a person that makes the individual or the people around him/her think about them in a certain way. To put simply, how do we think of ourselves and what to the others think of us. Identity is a key element that we need to wrestle with during pivotal transitions. Herminia Ibarra shares her insights on how we should treat Identity as a Work in Progress that gets influenced by the journey we go through and the choices we make. Ram Guha speaks about the multiple identities of Gandhiji. Atul Kasbekar speaks about how he saw his identity evolve from being a photographer to a producer. All this and more in this playlist. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Work and Life:** Leaders talk about how they think of work and life and manage to juggle the two. No universal answer here but a glimpse into how different people have framed this in their heads and have dealt with it. We all need to find what works for us individually. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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### Herminia Ibarra - Nuggets

- 47.00 Herminia Ibarra - The Full Conversation
- 47.01 Herminia Ibarra - Acting your way to new thinking
- 47.02 Herminia Ibarra - Experimenting with different pathways
- 47.03 Herminia Ibarra - Portfolio approach versus Full-time role
- 47.04 Herminia Ibarra - Pausing to reinvent
- 47.05 Herminia Ibarra - Operational, Personal and Strategic networks
- 47.06 Herminia Ibarra - Identity play versus Identity work
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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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