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## Context to the nugget

Paddy speaks about why mental toughness is a term that gets used a lot but there is limited research around what it is and how athletes can build it. He speaks about the criticality of embracing the doubts, insecurities and vulnerabilities rather than trying to suppress them.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In the book you also talk about the similarity of traits between psychopaths and mentally tough athlete and you actually go on to say that mental toughness is possibly the wrong tree to climb I was curious about the phrase it's was quite provocative give us a sense of what the insight is here?

Paddy Upton (PU): I think briefly mental toughness is a word that is very widely used but when we have a close look at it we see that the word is actually no such thing as mental toughness it's like batman and superman we know them but they don't exist and it's the same with mental toughness. I went and had a look through over 30 of the academic papers published in peer reviewed academic journals on mental toughness and there was over researches that had been are the authors of those 30 plus papers and not one of those papers or researches could agree on a definition of mental toughness. So if the experts can't agree on what it is on how you and I meant to decipher what this thing is that experts can't even define. What they went on to do saying there is actually know you can't define mental toughness but we can do as we can break it down it actually made up of a set of sub component like Grit, Determination, Focus, Resilience etc. and when we look through those 30 odd papers there is in excess of 75 different sub component that theoretically make up mental toughness which makes it an almost impossible to accomplish by definition. So that the one side of the so from research and a scientific perspective doesn't actually exist that's just the term that we tend to be bandied about, commentators and spectators and coaches and parents and athletes. Although we really dot know what we are talking about on another problem is when I have gone and studied now what the studies is on mental toughness I have studied what they call the mentally the tough mentally the strongest athlete and when we look at a list of psychopathic trends and we look at the list of the mental toughness trades they are almost exactly the same and what I contend and I just put out there I am just happy to be wrong but why is it that the psychopathic traits and the traits if the mental toughness almost exactly the same and I would suggest that research has actually studied this be psychopathic traits of athletes because that psychopathic trades actually do set people up for success in sports. So without going too far down that rabbit hole, the reality is almost every single human being other than out and out psychopaths this is important every human being athlete, business people, kids, parents, teachers other than psychopath have some form of doubt or variability or insecurities or negative thoughts or fears etc. that is perfectly normal the problem in sport is those things are all labelled as mental weakness as mental fertility or mental softness which

that really for me is the crux of the problem those beings having doubt, insecurity, variability and negative thoughts is not mental weakness it is not mental softness it is perfectly normal human characteristic every single top athlete that I worked with in over the 10 sports and its over 100s of athletes now other than the odd fuse... psychopath every single one of those athletes suffer doubts, variability, negativity, insecurities and that's perfectly normal and as a mental coach I do not try coach those people to get rid of those things because you can't get rid of them because it's part of our DNA as human beings. It's just the people come to me and they say I get really nervous before an event can you help me to get rid of the nerves. No that's normal why do you want to get rid of this its normal learn to keep focus and work with your doubts, variability, your insecurities your nerves those things are there just to again to highlight the fact and confirm the fact that you are human so what's important is while those things are going on the most best athletes in the world are able to fully and acutely focus on the task at hand and execute on the task at hand even though they may have doubt or insecurities or negative thoughts about it that's the fully committed and focused on the task at hand with those things going on they are faded more into that back ground and then order to fore ground of their thoughts.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This insight came up in my conversation with Matt Dixon (MD), an accomplished Triathlon coach in California. Here is what he said

MD: *"toughness is not a differentiator so I think one in the area that we help them find is how do you find this sustainable performance or a sustainable performance zone in many ways where they get battle ready to adapt and adjust and evolve based on what is coming at them whether it's a massive period of challenge in the work place a lot of travel whatever it might be and I think that intersection as applies for an executive is a heart of it they have a lot of responsibility at the work place and when that is challenging whether there need to be a leader whether I need perspective what they lose sight of quite often is the intersection of the absolute requirement to have two other buckets that ultimately gone help them accelerate and become the best leader the one bucket is what I would called is training and you don't have to be an athlete by the way to embrace training. The only reason I use the word training is exercise this random and nothing in life that you do random is gone give results training is structure of progressive so that's why we use that word but the key components of training to develop resilience in an emotional and a physical sense and then a big bucket of rejuvenation for then to ultimately be the best leader possible they have to have a set of positive habits in including sleeping, including habits around fuelling and nutrition. But also the chance to step away and have something for themselves and many incoming executives fail to value those two components to ultimately enable them to be successful as a CEO and you think about leaving in San Francisco all of these young tech entrepreneurs that still think that a requirement and a path way to success sleeping under the desk at night and coding into 3.00 a clock in the morning. But ultimately, I like but if sleep is not a marker of toughness or success it's a marker of performance stupidity"*

DJ: If this is a topic that is of interest to you, you might find the nuggets on Authenticity of value. Just go to Playtopotential.com, go to the Curated Playlists section and look for Authenticity under the section Leadership Themes. If there is one conversation I would single out, it would be my interview with Dr Ramachandra Guha who has written extensively on Gandhiji. He speaks about how Gandhiji was vulnerable to his flaws and that made it easy for people to relate to him and follow him. You might want to look up my conversation with Dr. Guha for more.

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## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Matt Dixon that is referenced: [Toughness is not a differentiator](#).

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## Paddy Upton - Nuggets

- 48.00 Paddy Upton - The Full Conversation
- 48.01 Paddy Upton - Physical trainer to Leadership Coach
- 48.02 Paddy Upton - Going on an inner journey
- 48.03 Paddy Upton - Building trust with the Indian Cricket team
- 48.04 Paddy Upton - Setting goal-posts with the Indian Cricket team
- 48.05 Paddy Upton - Sachin Tendulkar and personal mastery
- 48.06 Paddy Upton - Gautam Gambhir and the straight drive

- 48.07 Paddy Upton - Dealing with failure
- 48.08 Paddy Upton - Zooming in and out
- 48.09 Paddy Upton - Link between mentally tough and psychopaths

### **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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