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## Context to the nugget

James speaks about the criticality of us understanding our genes and personality (the deck of cards we are dealt with) and ensuring that we play a game that is conducive to our natural wiring rather than get to a canvas which requires us to deviate significantly from what comes to us as second nature. He also speaks about the explore-exploit trade-off in the way we could think about going broad versus going narrow in a certain area.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And we will get to the specifics of some of the things you say about how to build habits and break habits but one of the things I really liked in the book given that I am curious about transitions is you say that you work hard on the things that come easy, right? You go on to say that a good player works hard to win the game that others are playing; a great player creates a new game that favours the strengths and avoids their weaknesses. Say more about the crux of the insight here James.

James Clear (JC): So, this passage comes from a chapter where I talk about the influence of genes and personality on habits and behaviour and the basic idea is that we all have certain set of strengths, you know, there is some unique combination of strengths and weaknesses that make up each of us and you can't control the genes that you are handed or the cards that you are dealt but you can control how you play those cards or what game you choose to play. And so, as much as possible you want to play games where the odds are in your favour, where you are more likely to be able to succeed. Now, this can mean a couple of different things. First, in sort of like the personality sense, the most robust measure of personality is what psychologists call the big 5. So, it measures personality in five spectrums, the one that people are most familiar with is introversion on one side and extroversion on the other but there are a variety of others openness to experience, conscientiousness etc. and for all five of these spectrums they have been linked to the underlying genetic code somewhere, there is some connection between your DNA and that personality. So, as an example people who are high in agreeableness, which is one of those spectrums, tend to be warm and kind and considerate. And then you can imagine that someone's personality is that they are high in agreeableness so they are warm and kind and maybe they are also high in extroversion. Well, it might be much easier for them to build a habit like writing thank you cards or organizing social gatherings and getting people together for after work and things like that because it aligns more with their natural skill set. So, the first step in this I think is raising self-awareness, once you can become more aware of who you are, what your strengths are, what you are naturally inclined to do, you can start to seek out habits, behaviours, games where it's more likely that you would be able to succeed in that realm. So that's kind of the core idea and then the big takeaway I think is that a lot of the time people don't like talking about genes or DNA or your biological inclinations because they

feel like oh, well, if it's in my genetic code then why bother, it must be fixed but I don't think that's the right lesson to take from this. I think instead the lesson is your genes don't tell you not to work hard, what they tell you is where to work hard, they don't say it doesn't matter what your strategy is because it is just destiny instead, they inform your strategy. So, by having better self-awareness you could develop a better strategy to work for you and your goals.

DJ: And just picking on that James is there something to be said about when we have clarity on these things? I was talking to Herminia Ibarra, who is a professor at London Business School who has written the book "Working Identity" and she talks about transitions and really way finding your way into something else. So, on the things that come easy how challenging or straightforward is it for people to figure that out as they think about why they want to build the habits?

JC: Yeah, that's a great question. I don't think anybody has a perfect answer to this, but there are a couple of things that you can look for. So, the first thing that you can do is, and this is something that I have referenced in the book as well, the basic idea is called the explore exploit trade-off and so, early on in any process what you want to do is explore broadly. So, you can do this as a big of a level as you want or a small as a level. So, a big level would be what should I do for my career? Well, perhaps for the first say 5 years or first decade you actually explore kind of widely, maybe you take a different job every two years, maybe you try a few different industries, intern at a couple of different places but the idea here is to develop a range of experiences. Maybe you are in the same company but you just change to different departments every few years. So, the idea here is to explore widely so you can get exposure to a lot of possible paths and then once you have that experience then you can start to narrow and switch from explore to exploit which is let me take advantage of the best option I know of now. And so that's kind of a big way to do that. We do this for example with relationships, this is the period of dating as what we call explore and then once you decided to get married or commit to someone then we are talking about exploiting the one relationship that works best for you. So, you can also do it on a small scale. So, for example let's say you have a project and you have six weeks to complete it. Well, for the first week or two may be actually you brainstorm a bunch of different ways to attack the project, you research a lot of potential options but then as you get closer and closer to the deadline, now it starts to become more urgent that you actually get it done and so rather than always looking for a better solution you just commit to the solution that you are closest to at that point. So, there are kind of two ways to make that distinction. The one is how close am I to the deadline, how close am I to meeting the result now and if you are getting closer then it's like well, maybe I should just focus on the best solution I have found. The other way to do this though is that the more that you are getting results, the more you should exploit the option you have and the less that you are getting results the more you should explore for other options and that is... again and it is hard to describe this and what exactly you should do for any individual but people kind of implicitly know what that feels like. Like, for example, when I started my business I started three or four different websites for the first two years and none of... they all went okay but none of them really did well and then when I started [jamesclear.com](http://jamesclear.com) I was about a little over two years in and it just went better. I was writing about habits and behavioural change for the first time, previously I had been trying a bunch of other things related to business and marketing and when I started writing about that the audience just took off much faster than usual and so while it's hard for me to describe exactly what that should feel like for you, if you are trying a variety of things you will know when the results will come in easier and that's one of the good pieces of advice that I got early on was try things until something comes easily and it doesn't mean that it's easy in the sense that you barely have to put your effort in but it does mean that the results come much easier than the other things that you are trying.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is such a powerful point that James makes here. If I reflect on my own journey, I go back about 20 years to my classes in IIM Ahmedabad. I had come there after graduating from IIT Madras. So, I assumed that I ought to like quant based courses which I did. But if I really reflect on the courses that I enjoyed the most and gravitated towards, they were the courses in Organizational Behaviour. Even in my 4 years at IIT, my favourite course was Micro-Economics which was offered by the humanities department. And when I reflect on why it was so, it was because it was about understanding consumer psychology when it came to things like competitive advantage, marginal utility, price elasticity and so on. Now, I don't think I listened to this inner voice at that point in time. But it took me much longer about 13 years later when I was at McKinsey to discover this. As the consultants were evaluated on 3 dimensions (IQ the intellect, CQ – the capability quotient of a consultant and RQ – the relationship quotient). RQ was turning out to be my spike and I decided to lean into it and eventually join Executive Search at EgonZehnder and from then on branched off to do what I do now. But the point I am making is that there is something to be said about working hard on the things that you gravitate towards anyways. It has only been 3 years since I branched off on my own to run the podcast and my leadership and transition advisory but I can say that work does feel like play quite often. It doesn't feel like a chore. One of my guests at the podcast Was Abhijit Bhaduri (AB), the author of digital tsunami. I asked him if he had any concluding thoughts for people to play to their potential.

AB: *"I think it's a terrific title for the and world that you have to learn how to play and exploring your potential through play so it's not just a work it's a play which actually going to be tell you much more about where your potential is."*

DJ: What feels like play is directly linked to your genetic and personality code that James Clear speaks about.

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## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Abhijit Bhaduri that is referenced: [In Summary.](#)

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## James Clear - Nuggets

- 52.00 James Clear - The Full Conversation
- 52.01 James Clear - Journey to studying habits
- 52.02 James Clear - Building habits in the right areas
- 52.03 James Clear - Keeping the identity small
- 52.04 James Clear - Plateau of latent potential
- 52.05 James Clear - Systems versus Goals
- 52.06 James Clear - Building habits with awareness
- 52.07 James Clear - Environment and habits
- 52.08 James Clear - 2 minute rule - the gateway habit

## 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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Podcast Transcript [52.02 James Clear - Building habits in the right areas](#)

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