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## Context to the nugget

Atul speaks about how he is coping with the changed situation given Covid-19. He speaks about how he had to cancel several of his shows that he had lined up in Canada and the US and head back home as the world started shutting down its borders in front of his eyes. He also shares some thoughts on what he has been doing to stay positive, adapt to the times and move forward.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): That's a great insight and maybe that's a good segue Atul to talk about the current times we are in Covid-19 and your industry especially has been among many others quite severely affected. How are you grappling with what's going on?

Atul Khatri (AK): So, first of all, to be honest I am grappling pretty well. The thing is that I don't know maybe it was the... like I know a lot of comedians who I have been talking to in this pandemic and some of them are not doing anything because generally this is a time people are not getting any new thoughts about comedy because people are going through anxious times and it's okay to be anxious at this time because the entire world is going through this. So, I don't think any comedian has churned out a new one hour of material in the three months sitting at home because the thought process is not coming. And I think so the reason I am doing it because I have two kids now grown up, where one is in the college in the UK, so I have to pay her bills. So, there was a survival for me to sort of do something. So yeah, actually 13th March to 13th April, I had a tour of my new show Daddy Cool, which I just mentioned. It was an 18-city tour in the U.S. and Canada. So, I reached Toronto on 10th of March with assurance by Mr Donald Trump who said, hey it's just a flu, it will go away in five days. I reached on 10th March and the entire, in front of my eyes the entire world collapsed, Tom Hanks got the virus and the President or Prime Minister of Canada, his wife got the virus and the countries were just shutting down in front of my eyes. And I knew my entire one-month tour got cancelled, I mean, I postponed it, I myself cancelled/postponed it and I took the first flight and 14th March I was back in India and I knew that I was going to be sitting at home for a long time because... you know you always... initially when the pandemic started I always told people you had this Wuhan's case which is 76 days they killed the virus, I mean the virus went away with they sort of... again it came back there but 76 days. So, we knew at least for 76 days to 90 days and I know in a country like India, which is obviously we are not a first-world country, if this pandemic came to India, we would have a long haul and that sort of is coming out true. And so right on 15th March, I started something called as Only Positive News. So what happened from 10th of March till 14th of March, I consider myself to be a very emotionally strong person, mentally strong person but I started feeling anxious, I started feeling nervous, I had my breakdown saying that shit what is happening, never has this... it's like somebody has taken our voice away, of comedians, somebody has cut our vocal cord, I will not be going on stage, what will I do, how will I support for a comedian who has been so busy in

the last eight years, I used to have typically shows every... two-three shows every week, in the pre-Covid period. And I was very excited about this new tour, which I had worked on it for a close to one year because when you go for a tour to America it's like the Visas, and the new material, the posters, the public, the promotion, it's a one-year process and that just collapsed in like three days.

**DJ: And are these insured Atul, just out of curiosity?**

AK: No, they are not insured, they are not insured. So you like... and what happens typically when you are going there you try to buy the cheapest fly Dubai and go to Priceline and buy the cheapest flight, cheapest non-refundable thing because your tour is, your dates are fixed, this date you are in New York, this date you are in New Jersey, this date you are in San Jose, your dates, your tour, everything is sort of planned, chalked out, which hotels, you intend to buy the cheapest tickets, the non-refundable tickets. I lost a lot of money, let's not talk about that. So, forget the money part but more it was now the emotional part of and I started searching the news so I said, you know, let me find some positive news and there was nothing. So, I said, now I should find some positive news and start this series called Only Positive News. So, I came back to India on 14th March, 15th March I did my first video six-seven minutes and there were some stupid positive stories like a leopard in Bihar has given birth to two baby cubs, I said it is a positive story, let's put that. So, I started doing this on my social media and it became a big hit where people really enjoying it because just like me there were a lot of other people out there going through the same kind of emotions feeling open the TV, get your WhatsApp, open the newspaper or everything is, so many there, this is going to happen, this business shutting down, this is happening, this airline shut down, this company shut down and you are going to lose your job, you are going to this, this is going to happen and it's all happened also. So, it was right for them to get anxious. So, I said, let me let me come out with only.... so, since then I have been doing this Only Positive News, I think just day before yesterday was my 81st episode of Only Positive. I tried to start it with a daily, then I have made it like twice-thrice a week, I do it. So, I now do it at least thrice a week I do it, twice or thrice a week. So, I did like 81 episodes of this and...

**DJ: And where can people find it?**

AK: People can find it on my social media, on my Instagram, on Facebook, on my YouTube, I even post it on my LinkedIn profile, I post it everywhere, wherever I am there on social media I put a link to it, so people can go and watch it. It's just telling positive news from around the world and I was enjoying it because first of all it gave me a routine to myself, so I knew for the next... I want to do it so previous night I sit and research, I go through CNN, I go through Al Jazeera, I go through some of the Indian TV channels. Then next morning newspaper I read, I scan through it, collate the news, sort of put a structure to it and then I... I learnt editing because of that because when you put out a video it has to be edited well. So, I learnt editing, I had never known editing before. So, thanks to that I learnt a new skill called how to edit your own videos. I have downloaded editing software, it took me three-four days to understand it, learn it and now I have become fairly expert on it. So, I learned editing. So I churn out the video, I have put it out and I mean I used to... now the viewership has slightly fallen because people have got used to it but initially I used to get viewership every day of like close to one-and-a-half lakh viewers across. And I got so many new fans, followers, people... people are saying that this keeps me awake; this keeps me alive because I am here, my wife is somewhere else, and I am there. The only positive thing is your Only Positive News and please don't stop it, do it after the pandemic also, and keep it as a lifelong series, news funny, funny; they should shut down all TV channels and only put you on every TV channel for 10 minutes every day just to calm people down. Because I possibly more than the physical thing of this is the mental health of people which is getting affected. People are saying we will become fat sitting at home and things like that. I think it is the mental health which is really going to.... because people are generally losing

jobs, people are... the situation is not sort of improving as of now also as I speak, okay few countries here and there have sort of lifted lockdown but still the virus has not gone, till the vaccine doesn't come we have to be extremely careful. So, I started making money out of it, I got sponsorship out of it plus out of this I started doing my shows on Zoom, I started doing my live shows on Zoom. In fact, tonight, we are on 10th July today; I don't know can I say this? So today, 10th July, I have a show today; I have like 125 tickets I have sold today. So, we have a show at 10. So, I started this 10pm adults only, no children allowed show. The reason I did it because anyway children don't understand comedy. So, I tried to make it sound it very it's like sharing my bedroom secrets with them, but it's a regular comedy show and I have done like close to like 10 of these public ticketed shows where I have sold tickets, I have done lot of corporate shows. So thanks to because I had my experience of corporate, I have done corporate shows, I have done lot of private party, I have done people's... and you will be surprised people are celebrating their 40th birthday party, their 50th birthday party, their 25th anniversary on Zoom and people are really enjoying it, people are looking forward to come and laugh for that one hour. So, I have made money out of that and I mean I would say I have not made great money, but I have made decent money to sort of survive this pandemic and keep my two daughters and wife happy.

**DJ: And from a performer's perspective how is it, in what ways is it different performing on Zoom versus performing in a...**

AK: Oh, it's very different. So initially when I started doing Zoom show it was like actually honestly going back to 2012 doing my open mic because it's technology used there, technology there could be internet issues, there could be people... because as a performer you want their mics and videos to be on because you want to hear laughter, you know? But some people are not comfortable starting their mics and their videos or whatever. So I beg people, give me like a 25 out of 100 hundred tickets, at least 25-30 people should have their mics and videos on which typically happens and then you could have somebody eating food and talking to *arrey, mera do roti lao*, and that entire voice gets caught, somebody burping on the phone, loudly on his mic. So, all those things which you have, you remove jokes out of those also but those are the challenges but I think I am quite happy that I got into it fast into it. So, I think I had my first show, I think at the end of March only I had my first show, I think 1st April. So, within like 15 days, I had my first show to sort of understand how it is because going ahead and that has also helped me because it just got me a lot of newer audience also because you know earlier you had those one fan sir, I am staying in Jabalpur, when will you come to Jabalpur and I said, dude I am not going to come to Jabalpur to perform for you, if it was a big show I will come for it but now that guy in Jabalpur can watch my show on Zoom, you know, forget... people are... I have got fans from Argentina, Australia, from some West Indies islands obviously Indians who have... that has opened up, so this has opened up and I think just like how work from home is sort of becoming the new norm, I am sure its... so the experience is I would say 60% of performing on live because nothing can replace a live audience, the laughter, the experience, it's a four dimensional experience, this is still I would say two dimensional and I think that cannot never replace it. And I am sure, I am very, very again positive that this pandemic will get over soon or we will find a cure for it or work around and we will be back on stage soon. But we will come very late because first they will have to open up Bollywood, malls, much bigger industry which got affected because of this; they have to keep them happy. We are anyway a much smaller community and also the government doesn't like us very much so they will say you bloody open last.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: There are several interesting points that Atul makes here. Three stand out for me.

- First - I guess there is a lot of negativity around us. At some level, we all need to take ownership of looking for positivity amidst the doom and gloom amongst us. That is not happening by default. If we left it to natural forces, it's a free fall
- Second – Show up every day! This is one thing they speak about in entrepreneurship or in leadership. You just need to show up day after day. On 10<sup>th</sup> of March, he was in Toronto, and saw the world crumble in front of him and headed back home. 5 days later, 15<sup>th</sup> March – he started only positive news and has been at it since then.
- We all need to adapt and learn new skills and experiment our way into the future. I love what Atul says about trying something new, learning editing skills and putting himself out there. Slowly, that has opened up the opportunity to perform on Zoom and other opportunities.

I guess, we all need to find our own response to the situation but some of the principles here around accepting what is not in control, showing up every day, experimenting around adjacencies, keeping a positive mind are a few things that are worth bearing in mind.

Management thinker Jim Collins speaks about the notion of a 20-mile march. It's a bit like the tortoise and the hare story. He speaks about the benefit of having a steady march in a certain direction, whether it is rain or shine and he says that this approach beats the approach of sprinting when excited and resting when exhausted approach. If this is of interest, do visit [jimcollins.com](http://jimcollins.com) and look up the concept of a 20 mile march. There is also something to be said about steadily marching somewhere versus resting. Like Albert Einstein, once said, life is like a bicycle. To keep balance, you need to keep moving.

Thank you for listening. If you are enjoying this conversation, you might also like my conversation with Papa CJ, another stand-up comedian who transitioned from a career in Management Consulting to discovering Stand up. You might also like the way Amish Tripathi transitioned from a career in Financial Services to writing or how Atul Kasbekar transitioned from studying Chemical Engineering to becoming a Photographer and subsequently a producer. You might also like the playlist reinventing self where several leaders speak about how they thought about their journeys when they were at cross roads. To access this, please go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and curated playlists section.

## End of nugget transcription

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## Atul Khatri - Nuggets

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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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