



The banner features the Play to Potential logo on the left, contact details for WhatsApp (+91 85914 52129*), Twitter (@PlayToPotential), and the website (playtopotential.com). On the right, it lists 'Also available on:' with icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. A photo of the host, Deepak Jayaraman, is shown on the far right with the text 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman'. A small note at the bottom left says: '*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

Context to the nugget

Whitney speaks about how we all should think about the next S curve we could get onto in our journeys. She speaks to the notion of market risk versus competitive risk when it comes to identifying S curves. She goes onto say that the rewards are statistically better if we choose to identify a “job to be done” that is currently not being done or an unmet need.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And let’s talk about that Whitney, let’s talk about the bottom of a new S-curve and in a way when I work with leaders I say they are either asking a where to go question or a how to grow question and picking the next S-curve is a bit like a where to go question right which mountain do you climb. How should leaders think about identifying the next S-curve for themselves either internally or externally right? I’d love your take on what are some of the mistakes you see leaders make here? And the reason I ask this is to your point earlier the slope of the S-curve at the bottom is actually quite slow or quite low rather. It takes a while for you to get feedback on how well you are doing. So, you don’t know if it’s the right S-curve but it is still yet to take off or the wrong S-curve. So, how should we think about just picking the right S-curve?

Whitney Johnson (WJ): Ah, there are a lot of really good questions in there. First of all, I love that where to go or how do you grow, fantastic? Okay, so let me answer that question in two parts. So, let’s start with first of all the first accelerant of personal disruption. So, there are seven accelerants of personal disruption and the very first one is to take the right risks and that actually answers both of your questions. It answers both the where to go and the how do you grow question? And so, what do I mean when I say take the right kinds of risk? Well, there are two kinds of risk I think about, there’s competitive risk and there’s market risk. And competitive risk is that you know, you’ve scoped out the market, you’ve got these projections, you know there’s an opportunity, you just have to figure out if you can compete and when and with market risk is you don’t know if there’s a market but if there is a market, if there is an opportunity, then there’s no competition. And we know from disruption theory that when you’re willing to take on market versus competitive risk the odds of success are six times higher. So you want to when you’re thinking about your business you do that all the time as a leader like should we, you know, we want to... we are going to take on competitive risk if we think we can win but we also are looking for opportunities to take on market risk because we know that the odds of success are going to be higher. So that’s something then for you as a leader and as you’re managing your career you want to think about. What does that look like for me in my career? Most of you listening to this podcast have probably taken on a lot of competitive risk and you’ve competed in one but if you want to win even more and you’ll find that those instances where you have won even more, you’re taking on market risk. You’re finding ways to play where no one else is playing and let me give you an example from my own career that I think will really

illustrate this. So, I am working on Wall Street and there is a merger, our bank is acquired and my boss gets fired and I think they probably would have fired me too except that I had really strong reviews and I happen to be pregnant at the time. So, you don't tend to fire people that are pregnant with strong reviews. So, they're like what do we do with her? Well, they shove me into equity research, which is basically like going from flying a fighter jet to a cargo plane. So, remember that y-axis of success. I moved down that y-axis of success from the 18 to the 15 and once I got there to equity research it turns out they already had an equity analyst covering the sector that I was supposed to cover which was cement and construction. So, what do I do? How do I take on market risk? How do I play where no one else is playing? Turns out there were a number of media companies going public at the time, there was no analyst to cover them. So rather than knocking on a cement door that was closed I built my own media door and because I built a new door, because I played where no one else is playing and there was a market there instead of it taking me years to get ranked and get awards as an analyst, I was able to get to the top of the leader board in just one year. Now, here's the thing for us to really consider as you're thinking about your own career is that when I found a place for me to play where no one else was playing I also found a place for my organization to play. When you build your own door, you're building a door for your company, for your organization because the fundamental unit of growth, the fundamental unit of change in any organization is the individual. So, that's how you think about this idea of where to go but also how to grow, you take the right risks and the odds of success are always going to be higher when you are willing to play where no one else is playing as much as possible. One other thing I'll say on that because I think this really encapsulate this idea. A few years ago, I came across a quote from one of my mentors Bob Proctor and here's what he said: amateurs compete, professionals create. Isn't that good? Amateurs compete, professionals create. So that's what I really want you to think about is first accelerant of personal disruption you take the right risks, you create rather than you compete and so that's the first accelerant of personal disruption.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: For a moment if we pause and think about the world we are living in and the explosion in the number of possibilities around us given the exponential growth of technologies and the way they are being connected, I do think it requires a different approach to the way we think about climbing multiple S curves in our journey. Tarun Khanna (TK) of Harvard Business School was earlier on the podcast and he shares an interesting insight.

TK: *"Maybe you lived in the time of this sage Valmiki in India and there were certain set of known things and as a truly wise man, wise woman as the case might be you might expect to know point one percent of things that were known to human kind, and today with the exponential increase in knowledge you may know vanishingly small number may be its .000001 percent of things so the question is how do you ensure that you have a unique capability to contribute given this bewildering explosion of knowledge and the tinier sliver of which you are master or mistress and I think that puts a real premium on being able to communicate what it is that you have to the rest of the world so that you can facilitate the emergence of combinations with your own skillset, so that's the way I think about it, that the specialization isn't going to go away and it's a pretty straight forward corollary of the fact that you have to specialize to survive because things are developing too fast to do otherwise, otherwise you will condemn yourself to mediocrity but you if over specialized then your ability to communicate with people with different specialities is now at a premium so that you can raise the odds that people productively combine with you and find it useful to hang out with you and do things with you, so that collectively you will in to be in new possibilities.*

DJ: I love the way you frame it as an opportunity to facilitate a combination of new possibilities based on what gives you energy and your uniqueness.

And if I may say, if this really is a mindset issue confronted with this sort of issue I think a lot of people would find it, they may not have confessed it but will find it intimidating and it is intimidating at one level but the thing is it helps me to remember that everybody is in the same boat we are all trying to do the same thing, it's not like yours that the explosion of knowledge is uniquely disadvantaging your uniqueness if I may say that way and so there is really no reason, there is no upside to being bewildered, befuddled or lost you just simply get on with it and I think that mindset is actually quite motivating and you stop worrying about the fact that you know almost nothing."

DJ: If I take my personal context, As a search consultant at EgonZehnder, I felt senior leaders had access to the best of Bankers, Consultants, Marketing Agencies, Lawyers and so on for their business needs and didn't have anybody for their personal journey. I felt just like Strategy Consultants need to help companies with "Where to Play"; I felt there was an opportunity to be a trusted sounding board with leaders in helping them with solving "Where to go". Often it is not just a work question and involves understanding their life context, their aspiration, their family and so on. This also requires a piece around accessing the market opportunities. So, post EgonZehnder, I have tried to build a web of trusted relationships with the rest of the Search firms so that I can be a Sell-side banker to the leader or a Sports Agent representing the athlete. I feel there is an opportunity at the intersection of the poaching world and the coaching world and that is the piece I am trying to build in my journey over the last few years. It is still early days but I can say that it has been a fulfilling journey to craft something on my own terms to address a market opportunity than being one more player in an established market and participate in a shoot-out or a fashion parade when people have to make a choice for a Coach. It is still evolving and work in progress but all I can say is that it has been a fun ride so far. Whether there is a Product Market fit, time will tell I guess.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Tarun Khanna that is referenced: [Strategy and Careers](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Navigational principles: Leaders discuss their personal frameworks around how they made choices around pivotal moments in their lives. They articulate the set of criteria we should consider having when we are at a fork on the road and have to pick between disparate options. Arguably one of the most critical skills of the future as we navigate a world of abundance. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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](#).

SIGN UP TO OUR COMMUNICATION

Podcast Newsletter: Join 1000s of leaders who benefit from the Podcast newsletter. Not more than 1-2 emails a month including keeping you posted on the new content that comes up at the podcast. High on signal, low on noise. Sign up for the podcast newsletter [here](#).

Nuggets on Whatsapp: We also have a **Podcast Whatsapp distribution group (+91 85914 52129)** where we share 2-3 nuggets a week from the Podcast archives to provoke reflection. If that is of interest, please click [here](#) and send a message stating “INTERESTED”. Do also add this number to your Phone Contacts so that we can broadcast our messages to you when we share a nugget.

Whitney Johnson - Nuggets

- 62.00 Whitney Johnson - The Full Conversation
- 62.01 Whitney Johnson - The S curve of personal disruption
- 62.02 Whitney Johnson - Picking the right S curve
- 62.03 Whitney Johnson - Discovering our distinctiveness
- 62.04 Whitney Johnson - Leaning into constraints
- 62.05 Whitney Johnson - Cutting our losses
- 62.06 Whitney Johnson - Rethinking our metrics
- 62.07 Whitney Johnson - Handling our identity
- 62.08 Whitney Johnson - Discovery driven career planning

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](#).

Disclaimer and clarification of intent behind the transcripts

This written transcript of the conversation is being made available to make it easier for some people to digest the content in the podcast. Several listeners felt that the written format would be helpful. This may not make sense as an independent document. Very often spoken word does not necessarily read well. Several of the guests have published books and the language in their books might be quite different from the way they speak. We request the readers to appreciate that this transcript is being offered as a service to derive greater value from the podcast content. We request you not to apply journalistic standards to this document.

This document is a transcription obtained through a third party/voice recognition software. There is no claim to accuracy on the content provided in this document, and occasional divergence from the audio file are to be expected. As a transcription, this is not a legal document in itself, and should not be considered binding to advice intelligence, but merely a convenience for reference.

The tags that are used to organize the nuggets in the podcast are evolving and work in progress. You might find that there could be a discrepancy between the nuggets as referenced here and in the actual podcast given this is a static document.

Podcast Transcript [62.02 Whitney Johnson - Picking the right S curve](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

www.playtopotential.com

All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in any retrieval system of any nature without prior written permission.