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Context to the nugget

Whitney speaks about how we can think about picking career paths in a world with abundant opportunity. She speaks about the notion of maximizing optionality especially early in the career when one doesn't know what one is truly passionate about.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And overall in terms of guidance for people as they think about their careers you talk about the notion of discovery-driven career planning, right and I like your quote of The Times' columnist David Brooks where he says most people don't form a self and then lead a life. They are called by a problem and the self is constructed gradually by their calling and you go on to say that you actually discover your calling one baby step at a time. So, as we sort of wind down the podcast what's your sense of or what's your advice for people to think about their careers in the context of these multiple S-curves and the multiple disruptions that are happening in business and in people's lives?

Whitney Johnson (WJ): So, I have a couple thoughts there. First of all, one of the things that we've seen in the research is that 70% of all successful businesses end up in a different place than they expected. So the strategy that they use to become successful is very different than the strategy that they started with and I think there's an analogy for us in our careers and in our lives is we can start out when we are 21-years-old, 22-years-old having this plan but as we end up becoming successful and using this quote from David Brooks, we don't know what that's going to look like. And so we just start taking one step forward, we gather feedback and we adapt and over time we will construct that life for ourselves and we will very likely be successful if we will put one step in front of the other but what that's going to look like we just do not know. One piece of advice I have around that I think is that whenever you're taking that step forward sometimes there are three different options and especially for people early in your career you don't know what you want to do. We have two children. We have a 23-year-old, we have a 19-year-old, and they don't know what they want to do, that is completely normal. And even I think when people are 30 and 40 and 50, they don't know what they want to do. And so, when you're in that moment when you don't know what I have found the best thing to do is to say, okay, I've got three options in front of me, I don't know which one is the best option. So what I say to myself is okay, if I go in option A on the other side of option A, once I get to the top of that S-curve and it's time for me to jump to a new S-curve, how many S-curves will there be available to me, how many doors will be available to me, is it 2, is it 4, is it 20. Option number two, is it 5, is it 10, is it 15, is it a 100 and option number three, is it a thousand and what you want to do when you don't know is take whichever S-curve will give you the most S-curves on the other side so that you can give yourself as much optionality as possible. Certainly, that is important early in your career. And then I guess the last thing in building on this David Brooks is just

be engaged, be fully in the sweet spot of your life every day and then you're going to start to find these problems that you think I need to solve this problem. And then as you're solving that problem you will realize oh, I've constructed a life, it will surprise you and, in many instances, it will delight you.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more please visit playtopotential.com

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](#).

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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](#).

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