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## Context to the nugget

Bruce speaks about the criticality of taking the plunge after shedding our past to explore new possibilities. He links it to what we see in some of the greatest stories that have been told across religions. He goes on to say that growth actually occurs when we feel the discomfort when we go through change, much like how we build muscle when we go to a gym.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And in the book, you also talk about, I love the part where you refer to a scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade where Harrison Ford needs to take a leap of faith across a canyon and you liken it to the period of transition. Say more here. How do you see the link between that scene and your research after talking to thousands of people?

Bruce Feiler (RS): There is something about the fact that the great stories of every faith involves going into the wilderness in some aspect. It is in the Hebrew Bible. It is in the Hindi tradition where you go into the forest. It is in the Buddhist tradition. It is in the Muslim tradition, okay. It is in the story of all of the great mythologies have somebody going on a journey of some kind and that journey in a fundamental way is leaving what is secure and safe and going into this period of lack of confidence and wilderness and transformation and fear. So, at the first phase is the long goodbye where you accept it and you use rituals in some way. The next step involves taking a step and going through that process and that brings you to the Indiana Jones scene where let's remember here, he's in one place and there's a cliff and there appears to be no bridge. He actually has to take a step and then the bridge appears after he takes the step. That's what it is like to go into this messy middle and it involves two processes fundamentally. The first is to shed some habit some way of life. Maybe it is shedding your... maybe you like having a job and it is shedding that comfort of stability. Maybe it is shedding a habit that maybe you have been a people pleaser and you have stayed around something for too long, and it is taking you too long to say goodbye and you realize you have to stop trying to please your boss. Maybe you have to stop trying to live up to the expectation of your parents that dare I say it, okay. Maybe your parents have fed you these expectations that you must have a certain status and you must bring in a certain kind of money and you must do something that you don't want to do and you are I would rather do something that I want to do or maybe you have to say I want to stop making money and I want to start giving back to society you want to shape shift. So, you have to shed some expectation. This is the first half of what the messy middle involves and then the second half is absolutely astonishing acts of creativity. Once you shed things from your life you suddenly have room to try new things, okay. Maybe it is a new habit, maybe it is a new skill, maybe you start to paint, maybe you start to dance, maybe you start to sing. Like people literally do actual things. Like think when the pandemic happened everyone was posting pictures about learning to bake, right? That was the... I may have been the only person who was not

surprised by this because even the act of baking something small is an act of re-imagining. If you can imagine that you can bake something and that you can eat that and that little act of imagining that creation allows you to imagine that you can make and bake and create your new life. And that's what happened, it begins with small steps just like Indiana Jones sometimes on a bridge that you don't even know is there.

DJ: Hmm. And on a related theme Bruce, you say that transitions take longer than you think but no longer than you need. I guess the question here is how do we avoid the feeling of restlessness and an identity vacuum and a need for closure when we are in the messy middle. What are some of the tactical thoughts you might have for people to get comfortable taking that leap of faith and walking in the wilderness?

BF: Well, there's the tell, there's the tell that for you the long goodbye is difficult. It is going to be messy; it is just accepting the fact that every story ever told about change has a period of messiness in it. And I think to me the way I would look at it is first of all these are the greatest stories ever told. Why are these stories still told in every culture on the planet? Why their pilgrimage is going on right now in the lives of everybody listening to this? I don't care if you are in India, if you are in England, if you are in Japan, if you are in China, if you are in Mexico; all of these cultures have stories of pilgrimage and what a pilgrimage is fundamentally about, about leaving a comfortable place, going to an unknown and uncomfortable place, having some sort of experience and then bringing wisdom back with you. These are the stories that cultures have been telling for 10,000 years kind of like what makes you think that your story is going to be simpler. It was a myth that our stories are linear and never have conflict, okay? So, the first thing is to realize that all stories do including your story and that half of your life is going to be spent on a pilgrimage, a journey, a trip into the wilderness of this nature. Do you want to turn off your mind and heart and soul and skill set from learning from half of your life? Are you so darn good that you can just say I am going to learn from the half that stability? Look at any of these stories and the breakthroughs occur in the wilderness. So, realize that your story is fitting into a pattern that all stories have and therefore it is what's uncomfortable that is where the growth occurs. Think about being like a lot of people in the pandemic I have been exercising more and I was taking a class or something they are talking about what is the act of actually lifting a dumbbell, it is actually tearing the muscle so that the muscle can grow back, like we are wired to grow by tearing and rebuilding stronger. That is how our bodies are made and that's how our careers are made too.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Something similar came up in my conversation with Herminia Ibarra (HI), Professor at London Business School, who has studied transitions for several years.

HI: *"when you are making a transition people think you are going from A to B but you don't you go from A to this transition thing which we call liminality in our technical jargon to be. So in between you neither here nor there and it's horrible because you lose your identity anchors and so in that space it behoves you to be a little bit more playful because you are neither here nor there so that means you don't have to be consistent you can try, you can talk to people about jobs you would never consider or you can do things that are pretty much out of character but you know you are trying to learn something and that can be very freeing because we don't often give ourselves permission to deviate and so the two principle are you said divergent exploration and delayed commitment."*

DJ: A lot of us grow up with strong identity anchors (I am a Partner in this firm, I am a CEO here, I am a successful entrepreneur etc etc). As we think about what next, we try to hold on to our past identity anchors and look around but the reality is that the possibilities start emerging only when we shed the past. The aperture of the opening of possibilities is inversely proportional to the speed at which we are running and the firmness with which we hold on to our past identity anchors.

If this topic is of interest, I would strongly recommend Herminia Ibarra's book Working Identity. We also discuss some of the key insights in our podcast conversation. You could just go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and go to the speakers section. You will find Herminia Ibarra there on that list.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Herminia Ibarra that is referenced: [The perils of foreclosure](#).

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- 70.01 Bruce Feiler - The Power of stories
- 70.02 Bruce Feiler - Happy Families and Agile Development
- 70.03 Bruce Feiler - What is the shape of your story
- 70.04 Bruce Feiler - Disruptors and Lifequakes
- 70.05 Bruce Feiler - Midlife to Whenever life transition
- 70.06 Bruce Feiler - Make sense from scars (not wounds)

- 70.07 Bruce Feiler - Shape-shifting instead of resilience
- 70.08 Bruce Feiler - Three phases of a transition
- 70.09 Bruce Feiler - Taking a leap of faith
- 70.10 Bruce Feiler - Role of money in transitions
- 70.11 Bruce Feiler - Role of a Sounding Board/Coach
- 70.12 Bruce Feiler - In Summary - Playing to Potential

### **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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