



The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. To its right are contact details: a WhatsApp icon with '+91 85914 52129*', a Twitter icon with '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with 'playtopotential.com'. Further right, under the heading 'Also available on:', are icons for Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts. On the right side of the banner is a portrait of a man in a suit and glasses, identified as 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman'. At the bottom left, a small note reads: '*Just send us a Whatsapp with your name, number and email and we will add you to our distribution list.'

Context to the nugget conversation

Harsh speaks about his belief in Prof Ram Charan's maxim – Remove Escape Buttons. Harsh speaks about how he leveraged this insight in the way he went about pursuing the International Business and implementing the ERP system in Marico.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving on Harsh, you speak, in the book you speak about your belief in Professor Ram Charan's maxim of remove escape buttons.

Harsh Mariwala (HM): Yes.

DJ: And you say that in the context of your investments in MIDAS, your distribution application software. But I was curious about what that term meant.

HM: So, the term removing escape buttons is actually giving prioritisation to very high organisational impact initiatives and ensure that the person who is handling that particular initiative doesn't have anything that life depends on the success of that initiative. And I can give you multiple examples where we have removed escape buttons and that has paved the way for that initiative to succeed. For example, in the earlier stages when we wanted to expand internationally, we would ask the local domestic marketing and sales team to look at some of the international markets and invariably that would just not get the right attention because the Indian market was large. So, it would, their future was not dependant on those creating those new markets. And so, there were enough escape buttons saying that, okay, I have the local market to do, it would always get some sort of stepmotherly attention. So, we said that if we have to grow international, let's appoint a senior person, a very capable person only to look at expanding in international markets. And that really paved the way for us to start an international business, which today forms almost 23% of our turnover, which contributes to more than 2,000 crores in top line. But because that person's life depended on creating international markets, that person took initiatives organic growth as well as inorganic growth in terms of identifying opportunities for acquisition; he had all the time. So, we went to different markets like Egypt, South Africa, Vietnam and we were able to identify some acquisition opportunity, went into Bangladesh, created the whole market and all that would not have happened if it was managed by somebody else who was handling that business. And the same thing would be relevant for ERP package launch, you know, normally when you launch ERP in an organisation, it's a big initiative for the organisation and the tendency is to give it to your functional teams to handle ERP. What we did was that we chose very highly capable individuals cross-functionally, put them at a different location and their life depended on ERP success. So, nine-month project nothing but ERP at a different location, and we implemented ERP in such a smooth manner

we got some awards from SAP also. But the key thing is to remove escape buttons and also these organisational initiatives had to be backed by very good quality talent. And the same thing and I am talking of MIDAS or even I can give you multiple examples of removing escape buttons for key organisational initiatives, which have done well because we removed escape buttons and manned those teams with very high-quality talent.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is interesting that Harsh speaks about appointing key resources to really move an initiative forward. I had an opportunity to speak with Bill Carr (BC), Co-Author of Working Backwards – Insights, Stories and Secrets from Inside Amazon. He also spoke about some of the elements of Jeff Bezos’s leadership and one of the elements he speaks about is how Jeff used to think about What decisions and Who decisions when it come to some strategic initiatives. He speaks about how Amazon went after the opportunity in Digital Media after starting out in books.

BC: *“Yeah, so this has some context the day, it’s January 2004 and in 2003, as I mentioned earlier, Amazon exited the fiscal year having \$5.7 billion of revenue of which 77% were media products but 100% of those media products were physical: books, CDs, DVDs. However, in the marketplace it’s very clear that media is going from physical to digital, there are now more than a million iPods out there, there are countless millions or tens of millions of people using Napster to share songs, photography has already gone from being from you know physical film photo processing to digital. So, it’s very clear that it’s just a matter of time before people are going to be reading their books digitally, watching listening to music digitally and that these physical businesses would go away. So, what would most companies, you know, when presented with all this situation or presented with that the current product leader in the digital media space the hot item is the iPod and iTunes, nine out of 10 CEOs would probably call an emergency meeting of their leaders and say we have got to come up with our own iPod and iTunes, we have got to fight back and would scramble some team to go focus on that and focus on getting some clone or copy of iTunes and iPod out as fast as possible. This is a bit of a generalization but I think those of us that have been around would know that that is often the way that a CEO would think about it. So that’s not what Jeff did. Instead, Jeff said, the first thing I am going to do is going to take the head of our largest business, the Media business, Steve Kessel and then his lieutenant Bill Carr and I am going to ask them to stop working on that largest business and start focusing exclusively on Digital Media. That is also unconventional; what probably would have typically happened is he would have asked Steve and I to sort of start working on Digital Media as part of the Physical Media business because by the way it feels like a demotion to people running the biggest business in the company to now work on something that has no revenue and might not work at all. But if we had done that it would have been a part-time thing and the existing business would have always taken a majority of our time and bandwidth. So, instead by spinning us off now we had no choice but to focus on digital media fully.”*

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Bill Carr that is referenced: ["What" decisions versus "Who" decisions.](#)

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Driving Change: Ability to drive change in an organization is one of the critical Leadership Competencies for a CEO today, given more and more is getting done at the intersection of different ecosystems, and a large portion of value add is not directly under the leader's control but in the wider realm of influence. In this segment, leaders talk about how they drove change through a complex system/organization. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Context Based Leadership: 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.

Harsh Mariwala - Nuggets

- 83.01 Harsh Mariwala - Formative years
- 83.02 Harsh Mariwala - Tactful separation
- 83.03 Harsh Mariwala - Remove Escape Buttons
- 83.04 Harsh Mariwala - Breaking the Catch-22 of mediocre talent
- 83.05 Harsh Mariwala - Growing through feedback
- 83.06 Harsh Mariwala - Unlocking the power of the collective
- 83.07 Harsh Mariwala - Markers of good talent
- 83.08 Harsh Mariwala - Thinking about Next Gen
- 83.09 Harsh Mariwala - Playing to Potential

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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.

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.