

The banner features the 'play to potential' logo on the left. To its right are contact details: a WhatsApp icon with the number '+91 85914 52129*', a Twitter icon with the handle '@PlayToPotential', and a globe icon with the website '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 how he has grown as a leader over the years and how he has gone about seeking feedback from the people around him. He speaks about the criticality of setting the right climate for feedback for people to tell him what they think of him.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I think the other thing that struck me in the book Harsh was your evolution over time. I think, Hema Ravichandar, one of the board members, speaks about how you have leveraged feedback at various points in time in your growth. Give us a... the other thing I observe very often is entrepreneurs often don't get good quality feedback; they have a lot of people around them, but very few people show the mirror. How have you approached that?

Harsh Mariwala (HM): So, you are absolutely right. I have seen many entrepreneurs; it all depends on and my... I think, my journey is based on my own, shall I say, lack of education? I am just a Commerce graduate. So, there's nobody who was a guide to me or a mentor to me, and I have always learnt my whole whatever introduction to business. Of course, I had that genetic mindset in terms of understanding of business, but I never knew all the competencies in terms of functional competencies whether it is finance or HR or marketing and my initial years I have learnt and still I go on learning a lot from my own talent. So, if I don't know about something, I should have the humility to tell them that I don't know, please teach me. So, I have always had that mindset of learning from people down the line, which has benefited me a lot. So, I over a period of time developed a very strong belief that I have to learn from others. Number two, I also realise that every person has a blind spot. I may think about something but I have not thought of a certain angle to that particular decision. So, whenever we have sat down in a cross-functional meeting or in a meeting which involves other people, very important issues, some new thought has occurred come from somebody else, which never occurred to me. So, I developed a very strong belief in consensus, especially for some strong for important organisational issues. So, combining the need to learn because of my past backgrounds and the need for consensus has developed a very high degree of openness in me to listen to others. So, if you give me feedback, and I may disagree with that feedback, but if I discard that feedback and tell you that this feedback is absolutely useless, you are criticising me, then you stop giving me feedback. But if you tell me that give me that feedback, and I said, thank you very much, I value your feedback, but for whatever reason I don't agree, but please continue giving me feedback, you will continue doing so. So, giving that criticism versus critique is important, you are not criticising me or telling me instead of doing this why don't you look at doing it like this and I am also accepting it. So, the way you give feedback and the way it is accepted is very, very important in ensuring high degree of openness within the organisation. And we have been sending all our leaders

to a six-day training programme on leadership style, on openness, on critique and I think that has played a very important role in Marico being a learning organisation.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I have noticed that people in positions of power, CEO, Entrepreneurs, Promoters very often don't get good quality feedback. Very often they say that they have an open-door policy but my point to them is how many people walk through the door to have a candid conversation. I had the opportunity to speak to Amy Edmondson (AE) of Harvard Business School, recently voted as the No.1 Thinker in the Thinkers 50 awards, considered as the Oscar Awards for Management Education. She speaks about the calculus of silence and uses the example of Bridgewater Associates to speak about how Ray Dalio makes it possible for people to speak with radical candour. She uses an interesting term "Calculus of silence" to lay out how people think about the trade-off between speaking up versus staying silent.

AE: *"the calculus that I describe is something that's very simple which is that if you are at work where there's an old saying better to be, better to risk being thought a fool than to open your mouth and prove it beyond a reasonable doubt or something like that, it's a bad saying, but it's wrong, right? It's wrong in today's world but the calculus is such that if you think about it this way, if I think your plan might be fatally flawed and I am your subordinate, you are my boss, in that moment I might be wrong, right? So, in that moment I can speak up and maybe save the day but maybe not, maybe you won't be mad at me but maybe you will and whether or not all of that will happen is going to be delayed for sure. I mean your anger might not be delayed but whether or not my intuition about the plan was right or wrong is going to be hard to sort of figure out objectively for a while, whereas if... and so I am taking a risk in other words, whereas if I stay silent, there's no risk in that. If I stay silent, I am just there, nobody knows, you don't know, nobody else knows that I had a thought in my mind, I had an objection and I didn't share it. So, I talk about that as this fundamental asymmetry between voice and silence. The voice calculus will always lead subordinates towards silence not voice. Therefore, as leaders, you have to override that natural instinct. Now, the Ray Dalio case Bridgewater is a very special case, I call it an extreme case, where he understands, he so deeply understands that voice calculus, that asymmetry, where silence is generally cost free and voice is expensive for people that he says, why don't we flip that on its head? He says, why don't I reframe silence as unethical. And think about it, it's a really strong statement and yet there's a way in which we have to agree with that statement, because if you had a concern about an important decision or issue in a work environment, a strategic decision or a patient care decision that doesn't matter and you decided to hold it to yourself because it's safer that way, that is unethical, isn't it? Because you have training, you have expertise and we hired you to share some of that training and that expertise with others. And so, I think, it's rather interesting and that's why I highlighted in the book that Ray Dalio labels it as such where he just comes right out instead of saying, hey, we would love to hear from you, he says, hey when we don't hear from you, you are really not doing your job. In fact, you are so much not doing your job that I believe it to be unethical, right? So, it's pretty extreme but it's provocative and I love that."*

DJ: I hope you are finding the podcast of value. Do take a moment to rate and review the show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify or wherever else you consume the content.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Amy Edmondson that is referenced: [Calculus of silence](#).

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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](#).

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