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## Context to the nugget conversation

Ayse speaks about the power of having creative metaphors to help us unearth possibilities. She says that sometimes thinking logically and linearly may not produce the same effect as an “Out of the box” metaphor. We also connect the dots with an insight from Prof Dan Cable where he speaks about how he uses Lego blocks with senior transitioning leaders.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Ayse moving forward, you say that when we are in a creative process, there are situations where we get an idea but we cannot quite put a finger on what the idea is, and in those situations, you say that metaphors sometimes help us and help us get our thoughts across. Can you say more here, I found that very interesting?

Ayse Birsal (AB): Yeah, I love metaphors as a design tool because metaphors help us understand new or different things in relation to things we know. So, for example, the soup example we talked about is a metaphor, like making soup is a metaphor for design your life. So, what I do in my sessions is to ask people to come up with a life metaphor and then, using the hooks inside the metaphor to think about their life differently. The example I want to give you is actually the metaphor I have been using throughout COVID is metamorphosis. So, I ask people, our life through COVID is kind of like metamorphosis, and what is metamorphosis, it is the process of a worm becoming a butterfly, and so, well, not a worm, it is a...

DJ: Caterpillar.

AB: Caterpillar, thank you, so I will start that again. The process of metamorphosis is a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. And in the middle of that, you have the cocoon. And so, once COVID started and we started sheltering in place, to me, that was like us sitting like caterpillars inside our cocoons and everything we know breaking apart including ourselves. And then, I thought, well, before we were caterpillars, through COVID, we have been in our homes, going through an incredible change, and when we come out, we are not going to come out the way we were, we are going to come out as butterflies. And then when we come out as butterflies, that is really understanding that we are now a whole different insect and we have wings and we can fly. And using that metaphor, I got people to think about who were they before and what they want to keep from before COVID. And then what are the things that they have learned through COVID and the things that changed, and then that transformation that happened to them, and then going forward, what are the things that they want to keep and the things they want to change, including their new wings, you know, what is going to help them fly and take off. I hope I just demonstrated the incredible power of metaphors in helping us think differently.

DJ: Absolutely. I think it has also been a great learning journey for me over the last several months in the context of the podcast, just to hear how different people look at COVID through their own unique lens. One of the people I spoke to is a monk who is now at MIT, a gentleman called Tenzin Priyadarshi and he said, COVID is like a massive timeout that Mother Nature has given men and women to sort of, you know, you stay in your homes and sort out your stuff, almost like how we would tell our kids to stay in a room and sort out their thinking and cool down and sort of get on with life. And the way he framed it was just so simple yet so powerful. Similarly, this notion of a caterpillar and a butterfly, it is powerful, and the metaphor of a cocoon in the context of COVID, so thanks for sharing.

AB: Thank you. So that is why I love metaphors and for your listeners, one of my friends Todd Cherches actually has written a beautiful book, it is called VisuaLeadership, and it is one word, VisuaLeadership, and he also talks a lot about metaphors from the angle of leadership. So, the two, our thoughts are very complimentary.

DJ: You know one of the other people, maybe staying with the point about metaphors, one of my earlier guests was a gentleman called Dan Cable of the London Business School, and he actually said, when they have people in their workshops, they ask them to imagine different possible selves in the future and they give them a few Lego blocks and ask them to build something with Lego and use that as an opportunity to give voice to what is inside them. So, I can very well imagine the power of the right brain and metaphors and some of these surrogates to unlock what is inside us.

AB: Oh, I love that, the idea of working with metaphors and Legos. Well, that is powerful. You are making me think, one of the things I say in the book and I ask people to do is to write their metaphor and also to draw it. And what is interesting is the two things are quite different and yet they complete each other. So, as we are drawing, we think of different things, and then when we are writing, we are thinking about different things. And so, it now is one plus one equals three, a much more complete idea.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is the piece where Dan Cable (DC) speaks about how he uses Lego blocks with Leaders who are at the cusp of a Career transition.

DC: *"We have a program here called the Sloan's and it is a one year MBA kind of program for very senior folks that are like going into a new direction in their careers. We have them work on who they were in their last job and we literally have a session with LEGOs where there will be little people, there will be hoses and there will be building blocks and windows and doors and trees and we will just say, okay pick 25 pieces and then assemble them in a way that shows us who you are in your job today and then we give them 25 minutes to do that. And then we will say, okay, now grab 25 more pieces and draw what you are going to move toward in 15 years from now. If everything worked out perfectly, who would you be, what would you be doing, what would be your role. And so, then we have them do that, 25 minutes. And then what we do is we put those two together and we will say now describe to somebody what it meant and what it will be. And boy, the room just lights up because like the hose that they used to represent feeling strangled or the prison they put a block and they put a little person in it and say, this is me, I feel like I am in a prison and it just becomes animated and emotional. And by pointing at it, by turning it, it reveals things that they meant to say but like they would not have said it unless it was there. They will put a skeleton there and say, this is how I usually feel today. And then on the other one, they will sort of build a person out of vibrant colours and say, this is what I want to feel like and boy, it just becomes really fun instead of static, it*

*becomes enjoyable and dynamic instead of kind of, oh, I do not know, overly cognitive. So, anyway, I will stop going on about it but it does appear there is some really interesting science that when we allow our hands to build our ideas, we end up in a different and sometimes better place than when we just rely on a verbal medium."*

DJ: A lot of us who are brought up in the world of left brain thinking often struggle with reimagining our future in a white canvas. Suspending our left brain and leveraging our right brain a little bit more might hold the key to unlocking new possibilities.

Thank you for listening.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Dan Cable that is referenced: [Engaging different parts of our brain](#).

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- 86.02 Ayse Birsal - Nelson Mandela - a Master Life Designer
- 86.03 Ayse Birsal - Deconstruction and Reconstruction - The 4-step process
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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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