

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 of the banner, there is a small text note: '*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

Alisa speaks about some of the elements that Founders overlook when they look for Co-Founders. She also speaks about some of the conflicts that ensue between Co-Founders as the journey carries on.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving to a different theme Alisa, co-founders, both co-founder selection and working through the co-founder relationship, maybe starting with the selection, you use a term unforced error somewhere in the context of what founders and leaders could do but what are some of the common unforced errors you see founders make in the way they go around selecting the co-founders?

Alisa Cohn (AC): Well, it is actually the same that I was talking of the board, they do not check into the background of the co-founder. They have a few conversations, they are excited about the same thing, and that is it, they get the business together. They do not think about making sure they are both going to have the same work ethic, which I have seen many times where the founders have different work ethics and then they get angry at each other, understandably so because they did not talk about it in advance. They do not talk about how they deal with conflict. They do not even, you know, take enough time to have conflict together and then get themselves out of it. You know in my book, I talk about two founders one of whom wanted to build kind of a lifestyle business and one of whom wanted to build a really big business, and they never discussed that. So they did not discuss kind of the overall vision or future of what they wanted to build together. So all of those things together are just the lack of the unforced error there is, we did not get to know each other before we got into this relationship. And what I say in the book is when you have a co-founder, you have a marriage. And you have to treat it like that, and you have to kind of get to know this person and walk through their makeup, to your point earlier, their baggage, the things they bring to the table, good and bad. Also, you have got to make sure they have got complementary strengths. And if you do that, you will have a better chance of making sure this is the right co-founder. But co-founder conflict is the cause of actually quite a large number of startup failure, like I think it is 65% of startup failure, yeah.

DJ: And moving to co-founder relationship, I really like one of the things you say in the book, you say that, you know, one of the questions you ask is, how is the dynamic with a co-founder similar to the dynamic of the family you grew up in. I thought it was an interesting question. In a way, I guess it ties back to the earlier point about some of the old patterns playing out in a different canvas, but can you throw the light on this question and what the founders could reflect on here?

AC: I think that we unconsciously put ourselves into environments that we kind of replicate from childhood. And when I say unconsciously, I really mean unconsciously, but somehow you draw people to you who are going to help you play out your family drama and then in doing so, hopefully you can heal. In a good way, that actually helps everybody kind of heal from their background, their trauma. But what that means is that if you had, let us say, a father who was explosive and which is, you know, fly off the handle any moment, you may, without realizing it, find a co-founder who is just like that, just like your father, or if you have a sense of like your brother was always the star, always the sports hero, always like the big shot in the family, you might find a co-founder who is like always the star, always the big shot, kind of always looking for attention in the business and then you are going to feel resentful like you did for your brother. And so it comes back to self-awareness, the more you are aware of what you are bringing to the table in terms of your trauma and your trauma, your baggage, the more you will be able to first of all try to not just replicate that trauma, and also you will be able to recognize it when it comes up in your other business relationships and then deal with it like a thing, not deal with it like you are still fighting with your father.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: On Co-founder selection, I really like what Nandan Nilekani (NN) said when I had him on the podcast a few years back. I asked him about his insights given the journey at Infosys. Here is what he said.

NN: "I think the choice of co-founders is one of the seminal choices of any start-up for multiple reasons. First is that you must share common vision, you must share a common value system, you must share a common desire to postpone your gratification for another day. Because building companies, especially building companies to last, is not a sprint; it's a marathon. So, if your partners are short-term oriented, your partners want quick rewards, if your partners have ethical issues, it doesn't work. Everybody should say, OK, we're willing to defer reward for a decade. That's a big ask. So, I think the big lesson in Infosys was and [N R Narayana] Murthy had done a great job in assembling the people the fact that all of us were united in a common vision to create a global company. All of us were united that we want a very ethically run company with clear standards of ethics and corporate governance, and that we were willing to defer gratification for decades, if required. That was the binding glue and the fact that we put the vision above any of us. So, I think, getting the right co-founders is very important from a vision, values, timeframe of gratification point of view.

But there is a second dimension, which is that founders require complementary skills, because everybody is not good at everything. Somebody is good at technology, somebody is good at finance, somebody is good at marketing, and somebody is good at strategy, whatever. Therefore, one, is to make sure they have the same values and so on, but second, they also should have complementary skills. The best companies have founders who have complementary skills. In our case, together we covered all the bases, in some sense. So, I think, both these things are very important."

DJ: While the point around complementarity of skillsets and values fit is often well understood, the point around alignment of duration for which you are building the business is often an overlooked point. And as other people come along, like spouses and children and family, those factors start pulling the co-founders in different direction.

The other thing Alisa speaks about is Conflict Resolution. On this podcast, we had the opportunity to speak with Jennifer Goldman Wetzler (JGB), an expert on Conflicts and Resolutions. She speaks about 4 different archetypes of conflict resolution and how we all end up gravitating towards one or

the other. She speaks about how we can be mindful about our styles and adapt depending on the situation.

JGW: "So there are four conflict habits. One of them is one that I mentioned before which is that some of us in our quest to win a conflict, we might feel competitive and this can be a healthy thing. But when we take it to an extreme and we habitually want to win a conflict, it can get to the point where other people end up experiencing us as blaming them. And so we will kind of go on the attack and blame other people. In contrast, others of us habitually blame ourselves, we may blame and shame ourselves. So again, we may do this with good intentions. So our intention may be to learn from a situation and do better next time. But when we habitually do this, sometimes we end up stewing in our own negative self-talk which does not free us from any kind of conflict whatsoever, it just keeps us stuck in that conflict situation. The third conflict habit is shut-down and that is where we may again well intentionally avoid a conflict situation which can be a helpful way to deal with conflict when, for example, the issue is not that important to you or the person you are dealing with is not that important to you and so avoidance can be useful. But again, when that is the only way that we know how to deal with conflict and we are avoiding issues that are important or were avoiding people whose relationships are important to us, then it becomes an unhealthy way to deal with conflicts. And what typically happens is that the conflict, you know, we will avoid, avoid, avoid, avoid, the conflict is kind of bubbling slowly, simmering, simmering, simmering and then boom, you know, it explodes at a point when we least expected and then we have to go deal with that and we are not prepared. And then finally, one of the other ones that we talked about before is relentlessly collaborate. And that is where we have been taught often like we were saying before from a young age that the way to deal with conflict is to offer other people options, think about what their interests might be, come up with creative solutions, work with them to come up with those creative solutions. And again, that is a really excellent toolbox and skill set to have. And for so many millennia, people did not have that way of thinking about dealing with conflict and we got into all sorts of messes because we did not have that that skill set. But even that, people can get so tied and committed to using this collaborative skill set that we end up pouring energy, time, resources, money into trying to work things out with someone or a group of people who just are not interested in collaborating or cooperating with us. And so, there is all that, you know, wasted time, money, energy, resources down the drain. And so, there has got to be a better way. So actually there is a free quiz online that people can take if they are interested to find out which one of these four conflict habits is your default. And if you go to optimaloutcomesbook.com/assessment, you will find the quiz and you can take it. It is fun and helps people figure it out quickly."

DJ: Do tune into the conversation with Jennifer Goldman Wetzler if you would like to know more about your approach to conflict management. You can find her at the Guests section at playtopotential.com. Like they say in Marriage, there is nothing called They lived happily ever after. They worked on it to stay happy ever after is more like it!

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Nandan Nilekani that is referenced: [Selecting the right co-founder\(s\)](#).

Nugget from Jennifer Goldman Wetzler that is referenced: [Understanding the 4 default conflict habits](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Entrepreneurship: We are seeing a renaissance when it comes to entrepreneurship in this country. But it is not an easy ride. Leaders speak about how individuals should think about taking the plunge to entrepreneurship, how they could pick co-founders, their approach to scaling up their leadership muscle and more. 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.

Alisa Cohn - Nuggets

- 90.01 Alisa Cohn - Triggers and Dopamine Hits
- 90.02 Alisa Cohn - Giving away your Legos
- 90.03 Alisa Cohn - Policing your passion
- 90.04 Alisa Cohn - Imposter syndrome as a founder
- 90.05 Alisa Cohn - Stress and Depression
- 90.06 Alisa Cohn - Economics of praise
- 90.07 Alisa Cohn - Handling Leadership transitions
- 90.08 Alisa Cohn - Co-founder dynamics

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.