



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 '@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 the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host' and his name 'Deepak Jayaraman' below it. A small disclaimer at the bottom left 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

Michiel speaks about how our behaviour comes in the way of our learning when the stakes become higher. He speaks about the link between how team members listen and the link with learning.

## Transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And in the book, you talk about the learning zone versus the protection zone. Can you share a little bit around what you mean by these because in a way, that appears again and again in the various case studies that you outline in the book, so can you talk to us about what these zones are, how do we know we are in these zones on the implication on leadership?

Michiel Kruyt (MK): Yeah, sure. Learning potential is actually, it sounds like a very simple concept but it is very profound. As human beings when we are entering into a situation, let us say we enter into a new room or we enter into a meeting, we sense whether it is safe or whether it is not safe. And when we feel it is safe, we can be in a learning state. Where we feel there is a threat, we get in a protection zone. And when you are in a protection zone, it could even be like me entering into this podcast, that in the beginning, I am kind of like a little, maybe a little anxious, not knowing what questions you are going to ask and then kind of, I could very easily get a little bit into a protection zone. And then what I would start to do is, I would feel a little anxious, I would try to have the right answers ready, so I am prepared for everything that you ask, and I will very much hold onto that. So with that, I would lose spontaneity, I would not be playing with you around the questions and the answers, and it would become a very stale and overly prepared interview. Now interestingly enough, whenever we work with executive teams, we start with explaining this concept of learning and protection. And then, we ask them if you look at your average board meeting, executive team meeting, how much time are you in protection and how much time are you in learning, what do you think the percentage is?

DJ: I would say 30% learning, 70% protection, maybe.

MK: Yeah, that is about right. And then when the topics get higher stake and the context gets more uncertain, what happens to the level of protection, does it go up or down?

DJ: Yeah, I would imagine the guards go up, it becomes...

MK: It goes up, right.

DJ: 10-90, yeah, whatever.

MK: So the inconvenient truth of this is that, when we most need our collective wisdom, we most need our open minds, we most need to ask questions and look for new answers, that capacity is

least available to us. And it is not because we are stupid or because we are bad, it is because we are biologically wired to be that way. So therefore, learning and protection is a simple frame to make us aware that we are either in protection in learning and you can teach yourself to become aware of it. If you feel it in your body, you hear it in the tone of voice, you feel it in the breathing and you see it in each other, so that is why we use this a lot and there are many many teams that actually have made it a practice to call each other out on learning or protection state.

DJ: Hmm. And is this linked to the concept of psychological safety that Amy Edmondson talks about? As a leader, one of your jobs is to create the safety so that people spend more time in the learning zone versus protection zone, would that be a fair understanding?

MK: Well, I think psychological safety is definitely meant to create more of a learning zone. And what we are trying to create with this concept is that it is okay to be in a protection zone, it is just not very helpful when you are trying to lead something. But it is a natural response to a certain situation that can create a protective response. The trick that we want to get teams to do is that they actually address it, that they check, hey, are we in protection now, are we in the right state to get this solved or do we need to shift to learning.

DJ: Hmm. And maybe staying with that Michiel, what are some of the things to look out for a team to recognize that it is in protection zone versus learning zone, are there obvious tell-tale signs that people could be on the lookout for?

MK: Yeah. people know it immediately when you point it out, and the funny thing is, the team can be in protection but never all the members of a team are in protection. Typically, there is something going on between two team members or one team member is always hobby-horse and no one wants to challenge him. So there are always people that are like neutral observers and they do not act, they do not take responsibility for the learning of the team, but if they start to do it, they can actually lift the team up and get them into a learning state. So things to look for are, are we listening enough to each other, do we let other people finish their sentences, do we ask more questions than we tell things. And people recognize all these patterns. I mean, we had one team that spoke about, oh yeah, we know that, we load and reload. So when someone is talking, we are already reloading and then, we shoot again with our own opinion.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is a really powerful point that Michiel makes here. When we need to listen the most, the brain most often shuts down the fastest. Jennifer Garvey Berger (JGB), a Coach and the Author of Leadership Mind traps, speaks about how our mind often plays tricks with us and we are tempted to Listen to Win rather than Listen to Learn.

JGB: *"I have us look for what certainty feels like and begin to notice that as separate from a cognitive process like what does it feel like when you feel certain. You can often notice some things your body does like I move forward in my seat, I start thinking ahead to how I am going to defeat the disagreement or the perspectives of others, like I have a sense of righteousness in me. Now when I notice those things, I am able to say oh wait, wait, wait, this is an emotion, this is closing me down to new possibilities, new data, and I could totally be wrong here. So asking myself what is it that I am really believing right now, not what's true but what I believe is true and then how could I be wrong about this allows me to listen in a new way not to defeat the other person, not to listen to win or listen to fix their ideas, but to listen to learn from them to hold my mind open as a practice, as an*

*intention or practice as opposed to just going with this emotion that bowls over my capacity to learn.”*

DJ: Like Michiel says, if we listen to win, we are in a Protection Zone, not a Learning Zone and that can come in the way of efficacy as a CEO of a business.

## End of nugget transcription

\*\*\*\*\*

Nugget from Jennifer Garvey Berger that is referenced: [Trap 2 - Feeling right does not mean it is right.](#)

## RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Listening:** When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new”. This is a quote by Dalai Lama. Several leaders talk about their experiences with listening and how they have grown with it. More specifically, leaders also reflect on the criticality of listening when transitioning into a new context. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Leadership Development:** “How do I grow” is a question that all of us grapple with. The recipe for success is also changing as we move from an Industrial paradigm to a Digital paradigm. This is all the more pronounced in a start-up context where the job outgrows you very quickly. Successful leaders talk about the role of mentors, coaching, listening and more in scaling up one’s capability. You can access the playlist [here](#).

**Mindfulness:** Given we live in a world with exponential increase in content creation and with firms like Google, Facebook, Amazon and Apple vying for our attention, it is quite hard to reclaim our own space and attention. In this context, being mindful could be a key differentiator and a competitive advantage. Some leaders talk about how they created that space for themselves amidst the noise. 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.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Michiel Kruyt - Nuggets

- 99.01 Michiel Kruyt - HUL to McKinsey to Transformation Work
- 99.02 Michiel Kruyt - Pausing to Reinvent
- 99.03 Michiel Kruyt - Learning Zone vs Protective Zone
- 99.04 Michiel Kruyt - Accessing your Skylight
- 99.05 Michiel Kruyt - Ladder of Self-Awareness
- 99.06 Michiel Kruyt - The infiniteness of Purpose
- 99.07 Michiel Kruyt - Criticality of recovery
- 99.08 Michiel Kruyt - Collective Icebergs and Team Dominos

### 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.