

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 far right is a portrait of the host, Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host Deepak Jayaraman' below it. A small note 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

Devdutt talks about the profound influence of some of his teachers when he was studying medicine. He elaborates that they would often push him to think about the Why behind various elements beyond the what (anatomy) and the how (physiology). He mentions how that has discipline of asking the Why question has influenced his thinking and his approach towards mythology.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** To what extent people's formative years informed who they are and how that sort of shows up even in later years do you have a view on let's say how much of whom you are baked in the early years?

**Devdutt Pattanaik (DP):** I think you figure it out yourself I think my science background helps me in being organized and systematic, then I speak to my school teacher who say I was organized and systematic even when I was a child, which I have no memory of, I thought I was disorganized but for them I was highly organized so I guess that part has always been with me I still think I am disorganized but all my friends think I am highly organized so that's your perception, what do you know and what do others think there was a vast difference between that I think it's also about asking questions I don't take answers for granted and I have always been suspicious of simple answers I like to know the go deeper to figuring out what do people actually mean when they say something? And I think that is the very important part of my work when somebody says and especially in the management world everybody uses jargon, many of the time they don't know what they mean and even if they know what they mean, they are using it strategically not because they genuinely mean it so, empowerment is the word that will be used by people who do not give power at all but that's the right word to say in the public forum and I hear it all the time I had seen it among bureaucrats, among politicians corporate sector workers so that is something that very early in life I would always ask very fundamental questions and I would, and I think many children do but it just that I sort out the answers, many people just wait for answers to come to them especially in certain fields, I think science background helps you a lot because I was studying medicine and I had very good teachers who told to study medicine in particular way and I think I had applied just that principal in other aspects of my life that's same principal I saw it as a principal not just to study anatomy in physiology.

**DJ:** When you see medicine in a particular way can you double click on that?

**DP:** Text books will never tell you why, they will always tell you how? And what and how mostly, so anatomy is what, and physiology is how, so anatomy of the eye will tell you how are the how I designed and the physiology will tell you how does it work? It doesn't tell you why the head eyes

located in that particular location, why is the eye is not located behind your head, why is it round, why is an eye ball is a ball and not a square? These questions are not asked and then teachers would explain how this is a revolutionary process, it's something that started like this, it started here and this was neither part of the tutorials, nor even the part of any text book, its people who have sort of joined the dots and explained things as why do you have one mouth and not five mouth? How does it work because there are insects with many eyes and multiple mouths, why are the humans are the way we are, what happens when we stand on two feet, what happens to the backbone? So the why part of it, which is not taught in anatomy and physiology text book and it happened in the later years they will tell you read between the lines, and I had three four teachers I remember telling me these things, why is the carrotadetry designed in the particular way? And you realize that we used to just memorise it and get done a full marks so we had the full marks get the best students sitting in front, but we never ask why does this artery have more musculature and that artery does not have must musculature, we never asked the why questions and the best teachers in medicine would always ask why? And I think that was medicine but one I applied in the corporate, I would hear word like strategy and I was like why is somebody is doing strategy? I remember once way much later in life, I was in front of somebody, and I asked the person who was talking on leadership, very senior person, so why do you want to be leader? And he just suddenly oh nobody asked this question, we just assume everybody's leadership is good, I said why? And the why questions made many people very uncomfortable and I remember him telling me oh that you are writing on leadership, just pick up text book on leadership, take the table of contents and work on it, I am saying that why is that table of content is there and why is this a first chapter and not the second chapter? Even today even graphic design people, when you are IT, people don't know when do you use the bullet point, when do you use numbering, there are two different ideas, when do you use bold, when do you use italics, everything has the reason if you are seeing a design why is the book designed in the particular way? So you see badly designed posters for example you see the government offices and you see the posters and you realize that they are bad posters and you realize that reflects on poor intellectual base, extremely poor and you look at private offices itself some are good, some are bad, some are over dramatic some are using rubbish because nobody ask the question why? And the leader is too proud to say he doesn't know. And this is very evident when you start thinking in a particular way and this thinking came to me from medical college not even from school through medical college.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As we move to a world where the answer is a Google search away, the premium is clearly shifting to asking the right question and framing it well. It was fascinating to hear Devdutt talk about how his enquiry mindset was shaped by the way his professors taught him medicine. At some level the learning was less about the medical knowledge but more around the discipline of asking the Why question wherever you go.

This reminded me of an interview I was listening to an interview of Jerry Seinfeld by Larry Wilde (a student of humour and a publisher of 50 plus books on humour). He asked Jerry the question "do you think you need education for a career in comedy?" Jerry responds to that saying the process of education instils some sort of discipline for you to be rigorous when you write a joke. He says, he sees education less as something where he learnt a bunch of things but as a gym where you went to exercise and built the muscle of discipline and that can be applied to different contexts.

As move towards a world with so many unknown unknowns, I guess, a lot depends on our ability to stoke the curiosity of the children and instil some of these meta-skills like asking the Why question that will help the children navigate the world of future.

If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to YouTube and type “PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017”. I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. From people such as Zia Mody, Nandan Nilekani, Viswanathan Anand, Vijay Amritraj, Amish Tripathi, Vinita Bali and the like. For more, please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) where the content is organized by nuggets and they are tagged by themes so that you could get perspectives from multiple individuals on a topic that you care about. If you want to listen offline say during a car ride home or during airplane travel, you could also access the Podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn and several other podcast apps but that may not give you the flexibility to navigate across speakers by theme. If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it. Thank you for listening.

## End of nugget transcription

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**Curiosity:** “A Curious Mind” by Brian Grazer (Oscar winning Producer of movies like A Beautiful Mind and Apollo 13) was the inspiration behind the Play to Potential Podcast. In this playlist, Leaders reflect about the role of curiosity and how it has helped them in their journeys. As Alvin Toffler says, the Illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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### Devdutt Pattanaik - Nuggets

- 25.00 Devdutt Pattanaik - The Full Conversation
- 25.01 Devdutt Pattanaik - Early formative years
- 25.02 Devdutt Pattanaik - Transitioning from Healthcare to Mythology

- 25.03 Devdutt Pattanaik - Being effective in the Gig Economy
- 25.04 Devdutt Pattanaik - Dealing with various life transitions
- 25.05 Devdutt Pattanaik - Effective coaching process
- 25.06 Devdutt Pattanaik - Focus vest Perspective
- 25.07 Devdutt Pattanaik - Building Habits vs. Enhancing Awareness
- 25.08 Devdutt Pattanaik - Understanding fear to decipher beliefs
- 25.09 Devdutt Pattanaik - Building perspective and judgment
- 25.10 Devdutt Pattanaik - Building story telling capability
- 25.11 Devdutt Pattanaik - In summary - Playing to Potential

### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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