



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 Deepak Jayaraman, with the text 'Podcast Host' and '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

RG speaks about how he has thought about his career like a marathoner. He speaks about all of us having to rehire rather than retire. He uses the metaphor of Lego to state that each one of us like a Lego piece with its unique characteristics and we are looking for a hole in the sky where we could fit in. And he suggests that we keep looking (as Steve Jobs would say) till find a snug fit and we find ourselves in flow.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And maybe picking on a different theme Gopal, you know, I was talking on this podcast to a lady called Lynda Gratton.

R Gopalakrishnan (RG): Yeah, she is a very accomplished author, yes.

DJ: Correct and she was a Professor at London Business School when I was there and she has written a book called 100-Year Life and she says given the advances in healthcare all of us are likely to be working well into our 70s and 80s. From your vantage point what's the advice you would give to people in their let's say 30s and 40s. I see a lot of people from let's say batch mates from IIT and IIM who have had a very good first 15-20 years but as you take stock of your journey in decades what have you learnt about having a let's say a marathon of a career?

RG: You know, I believe life is a wonderful marathon and when you are running a marathon, I am not a marathoner but from what I hear from my marathon friends when you are at the 10th kilometre you don't worry about retiring on the 15th unless you are my age, if you are young and fit you... and so a marathoner keeps on running as long as he can and I don't see a career as being any different. So partly due to my father's influence and partly due to my own self-examination as it were I realized that I will not retire, I will rehire and just the change of one alphabet, the third alphabet, from retire to rehire made a dramatic difference to the way I saw. Now when you rehire you must know in which direction to rehire, what you are going to rehire with. Some people very lovely, I have a friend of mine who went into painting at the age of 60, somebody who went into "antim sanskaar" which is you know creating... he has created 14,000 places for people of different denominations to die peacefully and so on and so forth. I decided that this is what I would do and I rehired. Now, once you have rehired, it looks like an inexhaustible source of energy until somebody else takes that energy out of you, you can go on. So, I don't see age as a constraint, at some stage some faculty may give up but that's not something for me to think about.

DJ: Of course, and maybe to use your geology metaphor if I may dig for a little longer there anything you have learnt about how to think about where to, you know, the biggest question that leaders

grapple with is in which direction should I fire again? I have sort of been firing in direction X, now I have come to this point, in my life context...

RG: That's a very good question, I have just written on paper for my own edification not for publication and I have consulted a number of my cohorts who are about my age group as you can imagine and each person has spent his time looking for what to refire about at least 5-10 years before he retired and it was a struggle, the journey itself, you know, the joy of a victory lies in the peril of the fight. So, you have to go through that process, there is no prescriptive thing. But my definition of knowing when you have arrived is when you are able to undertake an activity in which time ceases to move. Like my daily routine I get up, I do my usual things and then by 10 o'clock I have had my bath, my puja, and I am sitting at my table and this was my office and I don't move out till 1 o'clock somebody gives me some tea or coffee and I have my lunch and... So, I am like working as I have done for the last 50 years but working on something where I don't know the passage of time. Each of us is like a little Lego piece. I love to give this quotation because we have got our own shape, size and volume and dimensions and we spend our lives looking for a hole in the sky where we will fit in and there are seven and a half billion holes in the sky, which is waiting for one Deepak Jayaraman, one Gopalakrishnan, one Srivastava and one Banerjee and so on and we have to go on trying to fix it until at some stage there is a snug fit, it just slips in. That's when you realize time doesn't matter anymore and that's the way I think I would encourage people not to get worried when they are 40 or 45 and I don't know what to do, I haven't got any enlightenment. You won't get any enlightenment but if by keeping on trying to fit into different shapes and sizes and finding that doesn't work, I am not encouraging being a rolling stone by the way but I am merely saying we automatically try various things and at one stage you will find that this fits for me very well and that's when you know that that's what you want to do.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love the phrase refire versus retire that Gopal uses to frame this problem. I do think once we get to our mid-life which is say post mid-30s, it does get harder to figure out the "where to refire" question. I like to think of this as a parallel to business strategy. Just like companies need to think about where to play and how to win in the context of their business strategy, we all need to think about where to go and how to grow as we go through our journeys. Where to go is quite parallel to "where to refire" as Gopal puts it. But I feel four things make it complex to solve

- 1 – It is a multi-dimensional problem that involves our various domains of life. You need to think about your spouse, his or her career, you need to think about the time you want to spend at home given your life context, it needs to financially make sense and you need to find it energizing.
- 2 – We often operate with limited data here. The reason I say is that most of the data we get on ourselves as we go through our work life is around "how to grow". All the feedback you receive at work is about how you can get better at the job at hand, not what is the canvas where you could flourish.
- 3 – Where to refire is not a sharp turn in the road but something that is organic and has to evolve over a period of time. We all grow up making career choices in a paradigm where there are a few options lined up in front of us, often concurrently like in the case of campus placement. Even subsequently, the moves are driven by a call from a Search Consultant or a Company. To put it in simple terms, it is the discomfort we feel when we write a Statement of Purpose for a college admission (for ourselves or our children). Having grown up in a paradigm of cracking the multiple

choices closed ended problem set. Mid-life transition around “where to refire” is a similar problem that can feel quite daunting Life problem and not just a career problem (multi-dimensional)

- 4 – Last but not the least, when you are in your 30s and 40s you are also firing all cylinders and if you are the Type A kinds, you are operating with limited residual mind space to thoughtfully solve “where to go” or “where to refire”

If solving “where to refire” is a topic of interest or curiosity, I could point you to a few resources at the podcast

- 1) The conversation with Herminia Ibarra, Professor at London Business School. She speaks about how we need to act our way into a new way of thinking than think our way into a new way of acting
- 2) You might find the playlists “reinventing yourself” or “navigational principles” relevant as several leaders speak about how they figured out the next mountain to climb
- 3) You might also like the conversation with Jennifer Petriglieri of INSEAD (Author of Couples that work) who speaks about how we need to think about these transitions as couples and not just individually

Thank you for listening. If you find this of value, do take a moment to visit the podcast archives at playtopotential.com. You might specifically be interested in my conversation with Michael Watkins on how leaders can settle in effectively in a new organization. You might also like the theme “settling into a new context” where we learn from leaders across different walks of life on how they navigated the first few months in a new environment including someone like Gandhiji when he moved back to India from South Africa.

End of nugget transcription

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Reinventing self: “How do I stay relevant” is a question that all of us have to grapple with as we go through our respective journeys. Careers aren’t linear any more. Some of the leaders talk about how they managed to pivot during their journeys and significantly change trajectories. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Pursuing your passion: “Follow your heart” is an advice that is commonly doled out to individuals that are trying to make career choices. However, the reality is little more nuanced. People who have followed their heart talk about how they have weaved it into their lives or in some cases, how they have been pragmatic about taking the plunge. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Navigational principles: Leaders discuss their personal frameworks around how they made choices around pivotal moments in their lives. They articulate the set of criteria we should consider having when we are at a fork on the road and have to pick between disparate options. Arguably one of the most critical skills of the future as we navigate a world of abundance. 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.

R Gopalakrishnan - Nuggets

- 59.00 R Gopalakrishnan - The Full Conversation
- 59.01 R Gopalakrishnan - Running your career like a marathon
- 59.02 R Gopalakrishnan - Making robust hiring decisions
- 59.03 R Gopalakrishnan - Settling in - Rock climbing versus Running
- 59.04 R Gopalakrishnan - Discerning the pecking order of stakeholders
- 59.05 R Gopalakrishnan - Solving for efficiency versus effectiveness
- 59.06 R Gopalakrishnan - Having the right relationship with the Board
- 59.07 R Gopalakrishnan - "Clementine Mirror" - the role of spouses
- 59.08 R Gopalakrishnan - Bringing in adequate porosity
- 59.09 R Gopalakrishnan - Getting cross-industry transitions right

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](#).

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.

Podcast Transcript [59.01 R Gopalakrishnan - Running your career like a marathon](#)

Also available on Apple Podcasts | Google Podcasts | Spotify

www.playtopotential.com

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.