



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, a small note 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 the arc of his journey and how he shifted trajectories over time and over time his interests and passions shifted from Sales, Marketing and General Management at Unilever to driving Personal Transformation at McKinsey and beyond.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Michiel, thanks so much for making the time for the Play To Potential podcast, really excited to be talking to you.

Michiel Kruyt (MK): Nice to be here Deepak, very nice.

DJ: And in this podcast, we are curious about people's journeys. So before we dive into talking about your recent book, *Deliberate Calm*, tell us a little bit about your journey and more specifically, some of the key transition points. I was particularly intrigued by a couple of points in your journey, HUL to McKinsey and then McKinsey to what you do now, but maybe there are more. So I would love for you to talk a little bit about your journey, especially some of the pivots along the way.

MK: Yeah, sure. I studied in Economics and then, I joined Unilever, and really enjoyed it. When I joined, I thought, well, let us do it for two years and then I will see where it ends up, but it was so much fun that I actually had a really nice 14-15 years with them with a couple of highlights running the global Magnum Ice Cream brand out of the innovation centre in Rome which was very exciting, and then, moving to Palm Beach, Florida where we bought Slim-Fast, the weight loss company. And that was a transition point for me and I had a couple in my career. This was one and it was basically, the Slim-Fast period was quite intense. It was a company that we kept outside Unilever and it grew double-digit, but it was the weight loss business, so it could also go double digit the other way around and at some point after two years, that happened. And long story short, at some point, I got a thyroid infection, stress related. We were in a downward market situation, we got stuck in our management team, we had lots of tough discussions, we could not make tough decisions, at least it took too long according to my standard. And I got a choice from a doctor either to take out my thyroid or to look at the psychosomatic background. So I did the latter and that was super impactful, and it might actually have been the early early early seed of this book because at that point, I got very much in touch with the awareness work and deep transformational work, so becoming aware of patterns and learning how to transform unproductive patterns into productive patterns for myself. Now what happened to me when I started doing that work were two things, one is, every time I learnt something new about myself, I got more influence back in the office because I could stop blaming my colleagues and start changing myself which is a lot easier than waiting for others to change.

DJ: And you were working with somebody in this period Michiel?

MK: Yeah, I was actually part of a group, it was a group work, so lots of people. Basically, the work was around helping people discover their blind spots, what was in between you and your potential. So I have done that for a year or so, and in that year, my physical condition totally went away without medicine. And as I said, every time I got in the insight, I got more influenced back in the office, but I also felt my thyroid slow down. And at the top of this condition, I was burning 8,000 calories a day which is like you are continuously running a marathon that is quite intense. There was not so much a transition, but it was something that brought broader practice into my life that excited me so much and had such a personal impact on me that it started to ignite a passion for something that I had not known before. And what then happened is my interests shifted a little bit more towards this type of work and a little bit away from the marketing, sales, general management track I was on at Unilever. So after a while, I took a sabbatical and actually started to look at how can I bring this work into the boardrooms because we are not very well trained to handle change in boardrooms, specifically when it is really tough, when paradigms need to shift, when people need to change mindsets, when they need to change or collaborate. So I thought, hey, what if I could bring this type of blind spot discovery work into boardrooms, it would solve a lot of problems, it certainly would have solved our problem if we would have gotten that skill into our team. So I took a sabbatical and interviewed everyone that had anything to do with working on the boundary between business change and people change, and ended up talking to a McKinsey Senior Partner, Michael Rennie who just traveled to the U.S. to introduce...

DJ: In Sydney, right, was not he based in Sydney at some point?

MK: Yeah, he was in Sydney and he experimented with what McKinsey at the time called mindsets and behaviours. And basically, that was based on an insight and a lot of good strategies but they did not get executed. And they did not get executed because people could not get their hearts and their minds around it and there was not enough buy-in and so this mindset and behaviour was actually there to help shift, let us say, the soft stuff in order to get the hard stuff done.

DJ: Got it. And I used to do some work with a gentleman called Bill Schaninger in New Jersey.

MK: Yeah, Bill was also part of the Org practice, I know him well, yeah.

DJ: Correct and he used to talk about Michael Rennie in Sydney. Got it.

MK: Yeah, he was a special innovator. I never aspired to actually work for McKinsey but when I met him, I thought, hey, this is where I, and I had another, I will do this for two years and then I will see what happens. But then, I ended up staying 15 years because I really enjoyed life at McKinsey and doing this work.

DJ: Wow. This was regular management consulting sort of in the McKinsey strategy, business, ops, sales, marketing kind of stuff or was it...transformation?

MK: No, it was very different because I only wanted to focus on this transformational work. So I joined Michael in this nascent practice that was called mindsets and behaviours, and we basically did only work with executive teams around the world to help them in their most difficult challenges, shifting their mindsets and behaviours. And then later on, that turned into large scale cultural transformations work as well.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Very often, we are hit with minor or major events which can give us an opportunity to pause and take stock. In these situations, we often grind our way through. However, sometimes, it might be an opportunity to reflect and rebalance, reprioritize and change tracks. Bruce Feiler (BF), author of *Life in the Transitions*, speaks about how some of these events could be an opportunity to shape-shift into a different trajectory.

BF: *“the kind of the quick and dirty on the idea of the shape back to the original shape conversation we were having is that there are kind of three pillars we have to how we make meaning in our lives. I call them the ABCs of meaning. And the A is agency, what we do or make or create. The B is belonging, our relationships, our colleagues, our friends, our loved ones, our co-religionists, people we volunteer with. And then the C is a cause, a calling, a purpose or something higher than ourselves. So, we all have a way that we kind of balance these. I am an ABC, I am a writer so, I am very agentic, I am very involved with family and a very active dad and cause is kind of less important to me. My wife Linda Rottenberg who started and runs an organization called Endeavor that supports high impact entrepreneurs in 50 countries around the world, she’s very cause oriented. She gets back to entrepreneurs all over the planet. Then she’s very agentic because she’s you know a founder and a builder and a social entrepreneur. Relationships yeah, she tolerates the rest of us. So, she’s like the CAB. So, what tends to happen when we go through a lifequake is that we rebalance like maybe we have been working very hard and we want to spend more time with our family or maybe we have been a caretaker or caring for an aging relative or a child and maybe we are now moving on from that and we want to give back or maybe we have been giving back in our career, we want to do something more for ourselves. So, what tends to happen in these lifequakes is because they are sort of breaks in the normal, they are opportunities and, in some ways, I would even say obligations to rethink what’s most important to us and allows us to kind of breath, take stock and maybe then shift our priorities somewhat.”*

DJ: Like Michiel says, building pauses that could help us make sense of these events can sometimes help us shape-shift to a more meaningful place.

Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Bruce Feiler that is referenced: [Shape-shifting instead of resilience](#).

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Michiel Kruyt - Nuggets

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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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