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## Context to the nugget conversation

Rajiv speaks about how he thought about stepping off the corporate track despite being on a very good wicket at Franklin Templeton. He speaks about the growing dissonance within and the quest for purpose and self-improvement that led him to this path.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Rewinding the clock, Rajiv, you were in a good wicket in Franklin Templeton a few years back. You grew the assets under management from \$180 million to \$3.6 billion in three years when you took on the role in India. Then you went on to lead the Asia business and grew the AUM fourfold. But then around that time, you quit to pursue a different path. Can you take us back to that passage of play and relive some of the thoughts, emotions and tribulations during those months?

Rajiv Vij (RV): Yeah, thanks, Deepak. I was very fortunate to grow quite rapidly in the organization and at a relatively young age as well, and I do not know if it had to do with that, or just my own inner journey. But somewhere in that process of growth, I started to become acutely aware of a sense of incompleteness within me. That something, despite all this success, something was still missing, and it was hard to articulate exactly what. And I remember telling my wife for the first time about it and she was like, wow, what is wrong with you, you know, like you have got, you know, you look at the typical list of things you want to be accomplishing in life and you tick all the boxes and, you know, what is happening. But it stayed with me, this little disturbance. And around that time, I got involved with some NGOs in my personal capacity, just through some friends and acquaintances. And as I started to spend more time with these individuals, some of the leaders there, it really inspired me very differently. It really got me thinking that this high-flying job that I have, jumping in and out of planes that I am doing every week, what difference does it make, does my existence even matter, will I leave this world any better than what I had inherited. And I guess many of us have these questions at some point in our life on that long flight or on a beach holiday and so on. But come Monday morning and we get sucked into the emails and the calls and so on, and the spark is gone. But for me, it stayed with me really, it really hounded me. And I was also, at that time, reading a lot about, you know, in the space of, sort of, who am I, purpose of my life, social change and all these sorts of existential questions. And as my friends often remind me, I was going through perhaps some kind of mid-life crisis and perhaps rightly so, but it was getting channelized in a very positive way. I had also learned some meditation techniques, you know, now way back like 25 years ago and found them really effective personally, even professionally, but again with a busy corporate life, these thoughts would fleetingly come and go. And around that time, because I felt torn and conflicted, confused, I revived it, and wherever I was traveling around the world, I would find my time to meditate every single day. Long story short, Deepak, what was coming through to me, was, while

work was terribly exciting, but the joy of being involved in two things, one, of working on myself, on my own personal and to some extent, spiritual growth, and secondly, of helping others in some way, at that time, it was through in a very minuscule way, through these NGOs that I was getting involved with, but it gave me a sense of meaning that I could get from helping others. And that started a bit of a hobby horse that this is the life I want to create and that is how I made the switch.

DJ: Hmm. And maybe going back to the switch as you say, Rajiv, you know, when I work with leaders in transition, you often have multiple pathways to choose from, in terms of how you scratch that itch, can you talk a little bit about the different pathways you considered and the one you ended up picking, the one you ended up walking on, as you transitioned from the busy corporate life?

RV: Yeah, once this hobby horse that got into my head, which was all about, I want to create a life which revolves around working on my own personal and spiritual growth and helping others in some way, that was the banner, sort of, the north star that I was working towards. And then there were many ideas cropping in my head. And by the way, this is all happening while I am busy in my corporate role, etc., etc. but I was like, should I introduce new forms of holistic leadership to organization, or should I start an NGO, or get into wellness. There were many ideas coming through, but somewhere in that search, research and ideation, I actually stumbled into the field of coaching. I do not remember exactly the book I read about it or first I saw it on the internet and I got interested, but as I started to learn and read more about it, it just fired my imagination. It was like, wow, this is it, this is what I was meant to do in this lifetime. It is like that deep connect where you have that sense that this is your calling where your whole sense of purpose that you want your life to be about, can get totally aligned to what you want to do professionally. So it is not like you are trying to live your purpose but in those 10 hours a day, you are not exactly aligned to that. I figured that for me, coaching offered such a wonderful platform. Firstly, it is about helping others, that is the primary objective of what you are trying to do. So I knew that is what will give me the sense of meaning and so forth, which perhaps, to some extent, I was seeking. And secondly, it is a space where, by the very nature of the work you are doing, you are going to continue to work on yourself because you cannot be coaching others if you are not walking the talk or you are not trying to grow yourself in your thinking and just in a holistic way. So it just seemed like meant for me kind of thing and then once this idea started getting crystallized, then I could not hold myself back. Then it was not one day, a few more years, I will be financially more secure. You know, kids were young, my kids were 11 and 4 at that time. But the call was so strong in my mind, and I do, you know, I am a left-brain analytical kind of a person but I did not do any analysis. I did not speak to another coach in the world, I did not figure out does it work economically, nothing. It was just like this is what I want to do, and the call was so strong, then I just decided, I still remember talking to my leader in San Francisco saying this is what I want to do and they, of course, took a long time to even reconcile like what is happening, like this sort of fast pace, successful executive, etc. And they in fact offered me a very interesting proposition. They said, why do not you keep your role Monday to Thursday, same comp, same title, everything stays the same, but Friday, Saturday, Sunday for the next 12 months, you are free to try this crazy hobby of yours and see where it goes, I guess somewhere hoping that I will get over this itch. Very tempting obviously, but I thought about it for a while and then I passed it. And I think that was such a wise decision in hindsight because it really, you know, the shift I was trying to make, Deepak, was not a career shift, it was a life shift that I was making. And in that life, I did not want to create time for maximizing stuff on all fronts and I knew that on a Friday afternoon when Korea office calls with a crisis, I am not going to be able to say, hey, I am on my off time right now, it does not work that way. So I moved on and yeah, all I can say is this has just been a blessing for me, both professionally and personally, it has just been wonderful.

DJ: That is wonderful, Rajiv. I love the way you frame it, apart from helping others, it is also an opportunity to be on an endless pursuit of working on yourself, which is so incredibly rewarding. If I

reflect on the journey with the podcast for example, I tell people, first and foremost, it is an L&D function for me. Even if nobody listens to it, just the privilege of speaking to people like you and learning from some of these conversations is worth the investment and everything else is a bonus on top, so it is wonderful that you frame it that way.

RV: No, I totally agree. I started writing, Deepak, primarily with the objective of saying, okay, I want to reach out to more people because I want to keep my coaching practice limited etc., etc., so how can I help other people benefit from some of these learnings and so on and so forth. But the biggest gainer of my writing, as I have now discovered, is me because writing forces me to crystallize some vague ideas and particularly when I am writing a blog for example, 600-700 words, it forces me to clarify my own mind from all these vague ideas that you have. By and large, you know what you are trying to do or what you want to say, etc. but writing the piece really helps me. So I have been a big gainer and I am glad you see the podcast journey in the same light as well.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The one thing worth pointing out here is that the conviction to take a pause and discover this possibility probably started with the reflection practice that Rajiv spoke about. That gave him the confidence to step into the unknown.

The other piece worth mentioning is that most often, we don't see the pathway at the time we step off the treadmill. The pathway often appears subsequently. One of my earlier guests, Bruce Feiler (BF), Author of the book – Life is in the Transitions, speaks about this eloquently where he compares this phenomenon to a scene from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade where Harrison Ford has to take a Leap of Faith.

BF: *“There is something about the fact that the great stories of every faith involves going into the wilderness in some aspect. It is in the Hebrew Bible. It is in the Hindu tradition where you go into the forest. It is in the Buddhist tradition. It is in the Muslim tradition, okay. It is in the story of all of the great mythologies have somebody going on a journey of some kind and that journey in a fundamental way is leaving what is secure and safe and going into this period of lack of confidence and wilderness and transformation and fear. So, at the first phase is the long goodbye where you accept it and you use rituals in some way. The next step involves taking a step and going through that process and that brings you to the Indiana Jones scene where let's remember here, he's in one place and there's a cliff and there appears to be no bridge. He actually has to take a step and then the bridge appears after he takes the step. That's what it is like to go into this messy middle and it involves two processes fundamentally. The first is to shed some habit some way of life. Maybe it is shedding your... maybe you like having a job and it is shedding that comfort of stability. Maybe it is shedding a habit that maybe you have been a people pleaser and you have stayed around something for too long, and it is taking you too long to say goodbye and you realize you have to stop trying to please your boss. Maybe you have to stop trying to live up to the expectation of your parents that dare I say it, okay. Maybe your parents have fed you these expectations that you must have a certain status and you must bring in a certain kind of money and you must do something that you don't want to do and you are I would rather do something that I want to do or maybe you have to say I want to stop making money and I want to start giving back to society you want to shape shift. So, you have to shed some expectation. This is the first half of what the messy middle involves and then the second half is absolutely astonishing acts of creativity. Once you shed things from your life you suddenly have room to try new things, okay. Maybe it is a new habit, maybe it is a new skill, maybe you start to paint, maybe you start to dance, maybe you start to sing. Like people literally do actual things. Like think when the pandemic happened everyone was posting pictures about learning to bake,*

*right? That was the... I may have been the only person who was not surprised by this because even the act of baking something small is an act of re-imagining. If you can imagine that you can bake something and that you can eat that and that little act of imagining that creation allows you to imagine that you can make and bake and create your new life. And that's what happened, it begins with small steps just like Indiana Jones sometimes on a bridge that you don't even know is there."*

DJ: This is important to point out because, all throughout our early life, we are used to holding on to the next trapeze before we let go of the current one. But when we come to midlife and when it comes to discovering possibilities that will help us play to our potential, this framework breaks down and it can be extremely unsettling.

But having a meditation practice or a trusted sounding board that can hold your hand as you navigate this path can be incredibly powerful. When you have a couple of minutes, do go to YouTube and type Indiana Jones and Leap of Faith for you to get a sense of how this metaphor plays out in our lives.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Bruce Feiler that is referenced: [Taking a leap of faith](#).

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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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