



EPISODE 116

Dig Wider, Not Deeper

The specialization that built your career can trap you two levels up, where every problem crosses a boundary. Drawing on David Epstein's *Range*, Maya and Marcus show why sampling beats early specialization, why leadership is a wicked learning environment, and how outsiders solve what experts cannot — then turn it into four steps for building range before you need it.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. Sampling Beats Early Specialization

Epstein found that most elite performers sampled first and specialized late — Federer is the norm at the top, not the exception. Narrow practice started too early is not the only road to excellence, and at senior levels it can become the trap.

2. Leadership Is a Wicked Environment

In kind environments — clear rules, repeating patterns, fast and accurate feedback — depth pays. Leadership has fuzzy rules and delayed, sometimes misleading feedback, so the winning move is seeing across many shallow ditches, not digging one ever deeper.

3. Outsiders Solve What Experts Cannot

Karim Lakhani's InnoCentive research showed that problems internal laboratories could not crack were solved disproportionately by outsiders. Organizations suffer local search bias: they search near what they already know, using the same assumptions that created the dead end.

4. A Winding Path Is a Qualification

Sampling builds match quality — finding the work that truly fits you. Your detours are ditches you can now see across, and what escalates to a leader two levels up is exactly what no single trench could solve.

The proof: Priya, a vice president of customer operations drowning in a claims backlog, borrowed triage from her sister's hospital emergency department — sorting claims on arrival into simple, complex, and urgent streams. Within a few months the backlog fell and the oldest claims finally moved. The answer was never in her building.



ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- ☐ **Step one — map your ditches.** Write down every kind of work, team, and industry you have touched, including the detours. That forgotten range is often your hidden advantage.

My ditches — work, teams, industries, and detours I have touched:

- ☐ **Step two — take one stuck problem outside your trench.** Ask who in another department or another industry has solved something that rhymes with it, and have one real conversation with that person this week.

The stuck problem I am taking outside my trench:

Who has solved something like it — and when I will talk with them:

- ☐ **Step three — practice import and export.** In your next leadership meeting, bring one borrowed idea and name where it came from, then offer one lesson from your team to a leader in a different silo.

- ☐ **Step four — lift your head on a schedule.** Block a short regular window to read and talk outside your own field. Range is not an accident. It is a habit you build before you need it.

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus