Becoming the Perfect Instrument: Podcast with Patrick O'Shaughnessy

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Imagine that you had only one conversation with which to project your life's work. You'd sit down with a conversation partner, they'd ask you questions, engage in dialogue – and you'd do your best in one hour to share the essence of what you've spent your whole life learning.

Whom would you pick? What might this person bring to light and bring to life?

Sitting down with Patrick O'Shaughnessy to record a podcast - listen here - for his series *Invest Like the Best* answered this question that I'd never even sought to ask. Patrick's series reaches deep into the theory and craft of investing; and reaches far beyond. (His conversation with David Epstein, author of Range, might be of special interest to readers of this blog.)

At the end of each podcast, Patrick asks the question: "what is the kindest thing anyone has ever done for you?" This question uncovers something essential in Patrick's magic, the specific form of kindness required to bring out the best in any individual's ideas. I don't yet know how to distill the different moving pieces of this art -- even as I frame the question, I'm reminded of E.B. White's "humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process…" - but I recommend listening to his podcasts not just with an ear to what his guests say, but to the magic of how he uses so little breath to elicit so much.

My conversation with Patrick begins with the story of Dr. V of Aravind and his question of how to become the perfect instrument. It covers some of the "greatest hits" of this blog:

- What to do about not knowing what you want
- How businesses are built over a series of eras, like levels in a game
- How to balance self-management and hierarchy
- What the red test is, and why it may be the most important litmus test of good management

Along the way, Patrick shares gems like Bret Victor's Inventing on Principle.

Experiencing this interview reminds me how much of my own work is about sitting in conversation with a leader, helping him distill the essence of his dream, and helping her formulate how what she's learned all her life applies to this next stage in her journey. My hour with Patrick provides illumination to this work.