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Context to the conversation

Neeraj speaks about how he moved from an output orientation to an excellence orientation, provoked by the feedback from the head of the Computer Science Department at IIT Delhi.

Transcription

Neeraj

And I have many stories. Exactly. I think I was a very optimized student at IIT Delhi. Like I used to believe output to our input ratio has to be maximized. And one day the head of our department in computer science, who I never used to get along with, called me and said, Neeraj, I don't care what you do in life, but whatever you do, Excel in that. So I think it stayed with me that excellence is a very important part of our life, just not optimizing. So I think I moved that day from an output to input maximiser to an excellent seeker. It was a profound shift from a person who I never really got along with.

Deepak

That brings me to the other point Priyanka made, caring about the last 1%. Talk to us about the sort of situations where that shows up, where you sort of push for that 1%.

Neeraj

I always say there's a very fine line between very good and excellent. And let's try to be on the right-hand side of the line. I feel clients can tell when you're excellent versus very good. I feel other person can tell when you're genuinely that. I think the market can tell.

But the pursuit from very good to excellent is not a 1 % extra effort. It's about 50 % extra effort. But it is that close. And I feel in the longest time for every, in every profession, the seeking excellence, whatever level you may be at, it really should be a calling card. So I tell this to all my clients, right? Or all the people I touch, right? I mean, it could be a youngster. I don't, mean, and it really goes back to my head of my department, I say, I don't care what you do, genuinely.

You could be in the music industry, you could be a consultant, could be in the corporate world, you could be a teacher, whatever. But what do you stand for? You have to stand for being excellent in something. And I think that as human beings, I think that's what we should all aspire for.

Deepak

That's a beautiful point actually if I may come in. One of the people I spoke to was a gentleman called Atul Kasbekar. He's a reputed photographer. He used to be a chemical engineer in UDCT and one of the things he said was in any industry as we move forward there'll be that 1% that will be in demand because they are the artists of that profession and one level below will be a... because it's commoditized and if you play there, then you'll be commoditized away. only... Actually, in a way, it's an existential need wherever you are to sort of really be that artist or be that beacon of excellence.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: With AI coming in, I feel the bar on being relevant is just going higher and higher. Atul Kasbekar, the celebrated photographer speaks about the importance of being at the top of a profession and the middle man being wiped out!

Atul Kasbekar: The other thing is there are just far too many human beings out there. Whatever it is you are looking to do, there is someone who is willing to do it cheaper. I don't know about better, but certainly cheaper. Not many clients out there want to pay for Louis Vuitton. So, either you have to be so good that 'woh chahiye toh uske paas jaana hi padegaa'. Then, whether you are a kadia placing marble, but what you do, you are a freaking artist, great! You will get money and you will get paid your due. If not, then you better be the guy who is literally everywhere and you are the Coke can, you are 30 feet away from whoever. That in-between guy is going to get wiped out if you are not careful. So, you just need to sort of be everywhere. That's a very simplistic level. I am no economist, but it seems like that's the way.

Back to what Neeraj says, striving for excellence is not a differentiator anymore. It has almost become a survival skill.

End of transcription

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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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