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Context to the conversation

Roopa speaks about how leaders need to have a healthy combination of humility and self-awareness to ensure that they don't get carried away by their success.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What I really loved when I read it Roopa was just as you said one is sort of having lived the experience of a leader and the various organizations you've been in second is as an investor you had an opportunity to work with a different generation of entrepreneurs and as a board member you've seen another cadre of people and in the various other conversations you've had so I think just that if I may say the prism through which you've looked at this is sort of brings the richness of what you share just maybe picking some of the themes that you discussed Roopa, I think one of things you say is higher you rise, the more important it is to stay grounded. Just going back to your journey, I was curious when you were the MD of CRISIL or the head of Omidyar Network in India, what's been your approach to staying grounded in these two specific areas?

Roopa Kudva EP2 (RK): I think, you know, as we all know, success can be very intoxicating. And what happens with successful people is, it doesn't take them too long to start believing that they and they alone are responsible for their success, which is why, you know, they end up not giving enough credit to people who help them get to where they are or help them along the way. And they do not give enough credit to the circumstances that led to them being where they are. What then starts to happen with if you approach leadership with this kind of a mindset, is that you start to develop blind spots. You start believing that you're infallible, that you have all the answers. It's hard to argue with success. So that starts reflecting in the way people around you start interacting with you and reacting to you. They don't question you. They don't challenge you. Rather than telling you what they really think, they start telling you what they think you want to hear. That's when the pitfalls begin. start, there could be ethical lapses, there could be errors of judgment, there could be wrong calls, which could lead to a loss not just of personal reputation, but also do damage to the business. So how does one guard against that? I think the first thing is humility. And the second is self-awareness. It is important to create an atmosphere where people around you are able to honestly say what they really think. It wasn't easy for me. mean, my early initial reaction used to be to bristle at conversations when people did not agree with my ideas or whether they challenged something that I was saying. And I had to train myself to really hold back and begin to appreciate that you know, challenges actually lead to polishing of a decision and lead to better outcomes. It didn't come naturally to me. So this whole thing of being open, being self aware, asking for feedback becomes very important for a leader. The other thing that becomes very important is for the leader

to demonstrate that no one is above accountability and she or he is not above accountability themselves. So whether it be in the small things like If everyone in the organization has to submit their travel expenses within three days, you as a CEO had better do that yourself. To the bigger things, to show that it's not just you, but the CEO is also accountable to the board, their compensation, their bonuses are dependent on what they deliver year to year. So I think this combination of humility, awareness and creating the environment where people feel comfortable speaking up is essential to staying grounded.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of something I learnt from Tarun Khanna (TK) at Harvard who has written the book Leadership to Last with Geoffrey Jones, where they have studied entrepreneurs in emerging markets that have built institutions to last multiple decades and generations. When I asked him, what were the key characteristics of the leaders in these organizations, he spoke about three attributes:

TK: "Geoff and I were when we were writing the introduction, a few pages, I was charged with writing the last paragraph something that brings the introduction to a close and I will read you our summary statement which is two sentences; here it is. Our overall takeaway is simple, we are just humbled by the combination of audacity of intent, humility of demeanour and steadfastness of purpose displayed by the giants whose life lessons are narrated here. And so, I would point to the trio of phrases that we use: audacity of intent, humility of demeanour and steadfastness of purpose. So, I think the stories here in a sense are each and every one of them is an ode to trust, which was the title of my previous meanderings on development in emerging markets in their own ways, in their own kind of beautiful ways. But they have all taken a very long time to painstakingly build, it turns out that's what it takes to build something that can redirect a society. There's a lot of humility in these people, may be to some extent they are, that's what it takes to build coalitions around you who participate with you to co-create the as I said in my earlier book to create the conditions to create with you so that you can collectively be much greater than individual efforts would allow, but they are not shy about what they want to accomplish, they have big goals, they want to emancipate women or they want to cure the world. They are not shy of ambition but they are very cognizant of their human limitations and willing to say sorry and reflect on their life trajectory, and they are willing to take the slow and steady long road, which is why the book is called Leadership to Last with an emphasis, so if you look at the cover of the book, the Last is the biggest word."

DJ: Back to what Roopa says, humility is a big element especially given the leaders are operating in an environment where so much is in the realm of what the leader doesn't know!

End of transcription

Nugget from Tarun Khanna that is referenced: [Leaders that build to last.](#)

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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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