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Context to the conversation

Roopa speaks about how leaders can harness the various strengths that different generations bring to the work force.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Roopa, I'm going to read out a couple of lines from the book which really struck me. You talk about leading multi-generational teams. You say managing a team spanning Boomers, Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z can feel like hosting a family reunion. It's chaos, fun and full of strong personalities. All insisting that their version of the rules for playing Antakshari is the right one as somebody who likes music. This one struck me. Bring this to life for us. What have you observed about leading these various generations each coming with their own strengths and their own, if I may say, blind spots?

Roopa Kudva EP2 (RK): So that was a huge change. One of the biggest changes in moving from Crystal to ONI was how I had to adapt my own leadership style. And consider this, right? So I was moving from an organization of 5,000 people to leading an organization which had 30 people. I was moving from a setup where I had a CEO office with five people just dedicated to that office to going and sitting in an open office where I did not even have an assistant to myself. And not only that, I was learning about a space of tech startups and entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs, which was completely new to me. But even my own team, I was working with a bunch of people where I was older than the parents of most of my colleagues. By far. So it was as different, it couldn't have got more different. And what I quickly came to realize about my new set of colleagues was they were extremely talented, extremely ambitious, very passionate about the work they were doing and about impact. But they also wanted a lot of autonomy. They wanted an input and a say in everything that happened in the organization. They were very big on feedback, both providing feedback as well as receiving feedback. And all of which was fantastic. The challenge I faced was, and they loved working together. They loved the idea of collaborating, working with others. And in such a set up, the first challenge I faced was how do I balance this desire for autonomy with the need to achieve organization objectives. You there were people who didn't hesitate to ask me, why have you come here? Why do we need a role like this in the firm? Which was startling, to say the least. And they came from a good place. They genuinely wanted to know. But that was the last thing I expected to be asked once when I joined the firm. And so the strategy that I adopted was one, to build because the firm was small enough, I could afford to take the time to build a deep one-on-one connect with each of the people in the company. I knew quite a bit about each one of them, their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. That was important. The building trust was important, not just with the entrepreneurs, but also with the team. So for a long time, actually, the first time I met the

entrepreneurs that we were evaluating was at the IC meeting because that was a way to demonstrate to the team that I trusted their judgment. I also focused a lot on being extremely well prepared for meetings and discussions because the idea was that, you know, can I provide that stretch to the thinking, ask questions that will elevate the thought process, make them think more deeply. So that involved a lot of preparation. And then to bring generations together, I found and I learned very quickly that each generation has its own set of strengths. And some of the things that we hear about the generalization, that millennials like to hop jobs or Gen Z is glued to their phones or Gen X are, they have these rude habits like picking up the phone and calling you directly without checking whether you're free and all of that. Some of them are partly true, but not entirely true. And the trick in getting people to work together is constructing projects and initiatives in a manner that draws on the strengths of each generation and also putting them through shared experiences. Be it an offsite, be it an outing, be it lunch together, where people get to see each other as people and appreciate each other for what they are and what they bring to the table rather than judge them in a more stereotypical fashion. So I think it's the combination of building a personal connect, practices to foster trust, coming with a sense of curiosity, asking deep questions, and creating some of these shared experiences which could break myths. They were not the... This is what I am now figuring out on hindsight. This was not a conscious strategy that I deployed at that time. But when I look back, I think that is what made the difference for me. And I feel that it is so exciting that we have four generations today working together. And if you really think about it carefully, and particularly in organizations where it's possible to do so, unleash the power of each generation, you can create something quite beautiful.

DJ: Very true. If I may share a personal example in the context of one of the investors I was working with, when I went to seek feedback from another person, he said there's also generational diversity in terms of mental models. So when it comes to robustness of decision making, if you can harness the generational diversity, you end up having better discussions, making better decisions. So I thought that framing around diversity was interesting. is not just gender and this and that, but also sort of that generation.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I love what Roopa says about creating initiatives and experiences where each person can get to see the strengths of somebody who is at a different phase of life. We all carry so many biases and have blind spots about ourselves, these experiences can thaw some of the frozen beliefs that might exist across the various generations in the organization.

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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Podcast Transcript [107.07 Roopa Kudva EP2 - Leading multiple generations](#)

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