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## Context to the nugget

A stand-up comedian is also a brand that provides services worldwide. So what can the world of business learn from the world of stand-up comedy? Papa CJ draws parallels between these two seemingly starkly different realms. Watch out for the anecdote on heckling and its comparison with dealing with feedback.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Talking about the parallels between the stand-up world and the business world, when I look at stand-up as a profession, clearly there's a piece around executive presence, holding your own in front of an audience. There's a piece around storytelling, which clearly has an impact on how you carry an organization with you. There's a piece around humour which is a good life skill, I believe. Give us a sense on how people can cultivate these skills and what are the clues from the stand-up world that can be applied in the business world.

Papa CJ (CJ): So, I would rather address the second part of your question, because the first part is pretty obvious, presentation skills, gravitas. I help a lot of C-level executives with speech writing, because as comedians we are mentally trained to cut out the fat. Every single extra word that is not required is removed and we find a way to get to the punch line, whether it's a funny punch line or a business point that you're trying to make. But there is so much that business can learn from stand-up comedy.

Today, as a performer, as Papa CJ, I am a brand. It is a brand that I have to cultivate globally. Now, I deliver a service in say 20 different countries. My brand values, my point of view, my value proposition does not change no matter which country I'm in. My audience might disagree with me, but I'm not going to change what I stand for. Same with any brand. However, no matter which country I'm in, I've to get that audience to relate to me. Similar for a brand. In a world of 140 characters and limited attention span, how do you, as a brand, grab attention instantly? Comedy can teach you that. What do I do when I go to a new country? I find out about their history, their politics, and their scandals. I read the last 10 days' papers, and I start with information and material that they care about. Similarly, with a brand, if you can talk about what concerns them instantly, you've got their attention. When you can take them beyond their borders, then you can bring them to your side and tell your story, but it's got to be about them first. So, one, grabbing attention.

Secondly, dealing with feedback. We get feedback every 15 seconds. I've already said this, if they are not laughing, you've got to change. How do you adapt instantly to feedback? Today, with social

media, as brands, as organizations, you get feedback immediately. Now, for us, we deal differently. We don't have a standard response. Today, you see many of these companies, you send them a tweet, and you'll get an autobot which will send you a standard response. We don't do that as comedians. You may have stock putdown lines, but eventually that doesn't work. If a man heckles me, I have the freedom to destroy him instantly. If a woman heckles me, I have to be gentle until it gets to a point where she is disrupting the show for the rest of the audience. So, for example, I had a very drunk woman heckling me once, in the UK. My first heckle putdown was, I said, oh look, I'm being heckled by a woman with the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. In fact, one eye is so beautiful; the other one can't stop looking at it. So, funny, gentle putdown. Then, the next putdown was, I got 400 people in the audience. I said, do you want her to keep quiet. They said, yes. So, on the count of three, I got 400 people in the audience to shout at one go to tell her to shut up. Next level, I said, ma'am, I would say something mean to you but I'm not going to do that, I'm not allowed to do that, because where I come from, cows are considered sacred. Eventually, I went on to say, I'm sorry, ma'am, I don't know how to deal with you because where I come from; we don't have fat, drunk women with low self-esteem. Now, that's an extremely rude thing to say. It's the kind of thing I would never say, but it's got to the point where the crowd hates her. They are entirely on my side and her husband has practically covered her mouth and put her under the table. Now, the relationship to that is, in your organization, when you're getting 'heckled' by your customers, which customer do you put down? Which customer do you address? Who are you kind to? And what are the different levels of the journey you have to take them down to deal with their query or their problem?

When I go for a show and my mother or my father are there, my father is never watching me. He is watching the audience, to see how they react, how I'm working the crowd. In your organization, who is CJ's dad? Who is Papa CJ's dad who is watching your audience? When my mum comes for a show, after every show, no matter how good it is, the first thing she will do is tell me about the things that I could've done better or that didn't work. I hate it. It drives me mad, but nothing teaches me more or helps me grow more than that feedback. In your organization, who is CJ's mom?

So, these are just some of the small elements that organizations can learn. I mean, today, I see so many start-ups and their communication is terrible. They want how many ever millions of funding, but over three minutes, they cannot even communicate what they do. I mean, come on, how difficult is it? What is your objective? I want funding. This is who I am, this is what we do, this is our team, this is the size of the opportunity for you, and this is our success so far. Bang! Done! That should take you two minutes, with two points under each of those. They just can't seem to do it. They will pitch for two minutes and at the end of it, you're like, but what do you guys do? So, I think, communication is a skill that comedians are very good at and we can help turn 50 pages of presentation hogwash into five minutes of bulletproof stuff. That is something organizations can learn from us, cutting out the fat.

**DJ: That's fascinating. I am told that you need to write an hour's material to get 5–10 minutes' worth to make it bulletproof.**

CJ: Yeah. Also, what we do is we market test. I will take new stuff that I've written to 10 small shows, try it out, see what worked, tweak it, before I take it on a big stage. That's another one of the things we do.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of the quote from Mark Twain - I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead. There is so much to be said about the criticality of brevity of communication given we live in a world with dwindling attention span.

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## End of nugget transcription

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### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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