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Context to the nugget

Start-ups often grow at a rate faster than the rate at which people build the leadership muscle. This leads to the risk that your job may outgrow you. Hence, it is imperative to keep growing as a person and as a leader. Ravi lays down three aspects you should focus on in order to grow with the times and your organization.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I am curious about how founders and entrepreneurs evolve as a company grows. Specifically, I like the term you used in your book, 'Conquering the Chaos', hyper-development, because in a lot of these situations, the rate at which the company grows is often at a much higher pace than typically how the person would grow. So, any thoughts on how founders could, sort of, turbo charge their personal development?

Ravi Venkatesan (RV): Actually, it's not just for founders; it's for anybody. In a rapidly changing environment, the biggest risk is that the job will outgrow you or the incumbent and how do you prevent that. I think, couple of things. First of all, this idea of learning agility is becoming more and more central, which is, you have to have curiosity. You have to have the ability to learn new things. So, that's one thing. One of the things that I really, really encourage all the people in the organizations I have worked with is, just start reading, whether it's a book, internet, whatever, and then develop curiosity. Curiosity is a muscle; the more you do, the better it gets. That's one.

Number two is, you have to have self-awareness and that's really hard. In fact, the more intelligent a person is, the less self-aware they tend to be, because they're so used to being right and getting a lot of recognition for that. So, self-awareness is a hugely important quality. This is where mentoring comes in. We're not all born self-aware. Somebody has to hold up a mirror to your face and say, 'Listen, please take a hard look. See how you're part of the problem'. Cultivating self-awareness, becoming more reflective, is a huge part of how you make sure that you grow with the times and the job. I'd say, periodically taking on a challenge which is completely different, stepping way out of your comfort zone, and being successful at it becomes important. That's what I've tried to do every few years. It gives you self-confidence. It strengthens your ability to learn new things really fast. You begin to see patterns and connections across lots of things.

DJ: Is there an example there, in terms of how it played out in your career, the stuff that you took on along the way?

RV: Yeah. As we discussed, I did Microsoft. Then, I went out and become a writer and I came into contact with lots of companies. Then, I did boards and I got into the Bank of Baroda. Then, I did

Social Venture Partners. And today, as a result, I am somewhat unique in terms of my ability to think about business, government, civil society, have networks across all these realms, and therefore, the ability to connect dots and connect people across these realms. It's a huge competitive advantage if you think about it. So, I think, it's very, very helpful for people to, periodically, completely refresh themselves. What happens otherwise also is that you turn 50, you've done only one thing, the world changes, and it's like back to 'who moved my cheese'. And you're fearful and just holding on for dear life, hoping that you get to retire with dignity. You see that playing out in so many organizations all over the world, and I think, that that's really dismal.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point around self-awareness is an interesting one. In India especially, a lot of the early selection into educational institutes is often based on IQ. As a result, one finds several High IQ, relatively lower EQ professionals flattening out in their career development as they hit positions of responsibility where themes around people leadership, collaboration and influencing start to matter. The unfortunate bit is that I would like to believe there are several people with adequate IQ and very high EQ that often don't get access to the same set of opportunities just given the scarce resources that are out there. The metrics of success often change as one grows in tenure. It's a bit like in cricket, in the first 15 overs when the fielders are in you could hit the ball in the air but get away with it. But in the middle overs, if you did the same thing you would be caught. Several leaders don't change their ways as they grow and what was once their strength starts turning out to be a derail.

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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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