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Context to the nugget

Picking a coach for a leader can be challenging. There are several variables at play and given what is at stake, it is critical to ensure that this is done thoughtfully. Viren uses the example of Mary Kom to talk about how they went about selecting Charles Atkinson to train Mary Kom. Some of the insights from the nugget are arguably highly relevant in the corporate world in the context of how leaders and companies think about their leadership development and coaching programmes.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Given that you work with several athletes now and a lot of coaches are ex-players, what's the delta again from being a good player to a good coach and where do you see people effectively making the transition? That's question one. And the other thing is how do you pick a coach in the context of a player?

Viren Rasquinha (VR): So, I will answer the second part first. How do you pick a coach in the context of a player? So, I will answer it with Mary Kom's example. In 2009, women's boxing was introduced in the London 2012 Olympics for the first time ever. Mary was already a five-time world champion winner, but in the 46 kg weight category and 48 kg for the last one. Now, when women's boxing was announced in 2009, that it would be for the first time in London 2012 Olympics — before that boxing was only a men's sport — but the least weight category for women was 51 kilos. So, that meant Mary Kom, who was originally a 46 kg boxer had to move into 51, which is two weight categories higher. It had been unheard of for a boxer to go two weight categories higher and win an Olympic medal. Now, the challenge was, when you're fighting in a weight category not only do you have to put on the right kind of weight but you are fighting against taller opponents, which is a major technical challenge in boxing. If you are fighting against a taller opponent, that's a big challenge. We researched a lot and found a coach by the name of Charles Atkinson who specialized in taking fighters up weight categories and making them into world champions. So, that was the context.

DJ: It's a very specific developmental need and you sort of got a coach for that.

VR: Yes. So, he is specialized in taking fighters up weight categories. He understood the requirements. He understood the specific training needs behind taking fighters up weight categories and the challenges of fighting against taller opponents, etcetera. That was one.

About identifying talented coaches, in general, that would be the basics, about seeing their track record, seeing their temperament, looking at the temperament of the players. Because very often, especially in shooting, one coach might be liked by one shooter but that same coach would not be

liked by another shooter, because technical skills within the same event, say 10-meter air rifle shooting, are very different. So, for Gagan Narang, that coach might really work for him, but the coach might not work for another 10-meter air rifle shooter. So, you are going to match all these. Shooting is, uniquely, a very individual sport, because while some say that a coach is good for their technique, the next shooter says that he is tampering with my technique. So, we need to be very careful and constantly monitor very carefully, take feedback from everyone concerned, arrive at a stage where everyone is benefitting from the relationship. But it's a constant process and good monitoring, good relationships, good communication is critical.

DJ: It's easy to measure the performance of a player, but it's much harder to measure the effectiveness of a coach. So, is there a certain way in which you go about doing it at OGQ?

VR: It's difficult to measure the performance of a coach. I would say it's even tougher to measure the performance of a mental training coach, sports psychologist, etcetera, because if the athlete wins, then everyone says, everything is working damn well. If they lose, you are finding people to blame and things that went wrong. So, in general, in the long run, results do count. I wish there was another route, but you tend to know when a boss or a coach is bringing the best out of you, whether he or she is motivating you every single day, whether he or she is teaching you knew things, whether you are finding the training session interesting. You are improving, you are learning new skills, and you are improving on your existing skills. So, you need to look at all those factors. But yes, it is hard to measure, hard to really put a very strong matrix in place for every single thing.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If I were to relate to how some people think about leadership development, I find that in several situations, people pick the coach before diagnosing what the specific developmental need is. They often pick the coach first and suggest that the Coach does an upfront 360 and gets started with the coaching programme. I remember working with a leader where after the assessment, the key "unlocking opportunity" for the leader was to be more organized and productive with time. I put him in touch with a time management expert who is in Australia and who is doing Skype sessions for him to help him raise the game and the leader is seeing the value from this. I ask myself the question, am I the best possible person to provide perspective and work with the leader given what is showing up. If the answer is No, then I believe that often I am doing a dis-service to the leader by becoming the coach by default after the diagnosis.

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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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