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## Context to the nugget

Prakash talks about the role of story-telling in the context of building culture and how one could think about building that muscle. Sometimes, people think that there is a trade-off between story-telling and brevity. He talks about that being a false trade-off and discusses how one could employ both to drive effective communication.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** How do you think of the trade-off between brevity, getting to the point, not wasting the client's time and weaving a story, establishing an emotional connect? And how do people build the storytelling muscle? What do you do and what are some of the lessons you've learnt?

**Prakash Iyer (PI):** The first question first. It's a mistake to think that there is a trade-off between having a coherent, logical approach to an argument versus telling a story. In an ideal scenario, you have fairly sound logic and a coherent argument to make, but if you just stayed with the logic, you'd probably not be as effective as if you were able to wrap this around in a story. A great story without the logic being right won't really be powerful. I think, the mistake people make is to think just the story would do. The mistake that a lot of consultants might make could be to believe that we are really here to cut to the chase here's what the story is all about, here's what the meat is, here's what the message is, here's the logic. I think, the point is that we all like logic but we don't always buy it. We are all emotional at one level, we want to remember, and we want to be told in a nice way. And, I think, stories have this ability to connect a lot better. Stories are also very powerful in terms of just being able to retain the message, to be more memorable; I think, stories can go a long way in helping. Stories are also a good way to make messages more palatable. Very often, what happens is, if you tell someone you are like this and this is the problem with your business or this is what you need to do, you're constantly trying to be on the back foot, defending your business, defending yourself. But if you can move this to a story about another world, another place, suddenly you've got my interest and my buy-in. And I can now see what's happening out there and maybe the message now gets in that what worked for them might work for me, and I am more willing to take it.

**DJ:** How do you get people to be good storytellers? What do you do and what's been your experience in enabling others to be good storytellers?

**PI:** I think, there is a storyteller inside each of us. We all love to tell stories. So, I guess, the first bit would be for us as leaders to recognize that hey, there's a story that I'd like to tell and maybe it's an effective way to get my message across. And then, try and tell leaders that there are five or six stories that leaders must learn to tell. The truth is that stories are all around us; you just need to

look. Leaders, themselves, are often surprised when they start looking. There are so many stories that they find, and then, I help them with the idea that once you have the story don't worry too much about how to tell the story or how to craft the story. That's the easy bit. The real positive in all this is really the fantastic stories that are around, waiting to be told. Once a leader gets his or her hands around that story, the rest becomes fairly easy. I think, leaders then start enjoying it, and then, they discover what started off as one, two, and three stories, suddenly has become five and 10, and that works well in an organizational context, I think.

**DJ: What's been your experience in the role of stories in building a culture in a company?**

PI: Organizations are now discovering something that employees always knew. So, if you think about it, if you were in a canteen, what's the water cooler gossip all about, it's about stories. So, employees have been telling each other stories for years. If you look at how people think of their bosses, they tell stories. How they think of what the organization is all about, they tell stories. What leaders can now do is to try and say, hey, how we can ensure that we have the right kind of stories that are being shared. If you don't share the stories, people will find their own stories in any case.

So, what storytelling can do, from a culture-building perspective, is to try and make culture come alive, to try and sensitize people to what this place is really all about. And, I think, if leaders learnt to tell the stories, they'll figure that they can use storytelling to dramatically alter what culture looks like in that place, to also make culture come alive. Great leaders, what they do is they find other people who are doing the things that the culture of this business is all about and then they tell stories about it. And at another level, what they do is to do those things which their culture is supposed to be all about and then tell the world about it. So, in both cases, it's first, making sure somebody's doing it and then, talking about it. And that's really what stories can do.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I was talking to the Country Head of J&J Consumer recently and he was talking about the Credo which was crafted almost about 75 years back. When I asked him about how they ensure that it has stood the test of time, he brought it back to the role of storytelling in building a culture that lives by the credo. One of my earlier guests, Captain Raghu Raman spoke lucidly about the role of storytelling in building culture in the Armed Forces when new recruits are inducted into a unit. If this is a topic of interest, you should look that up as well. That is Nugget 3.08 for quick reference.

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## End of nugget transcription

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## Prakash Iyer - Nuggets

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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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