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Context to the nugget

Prakash discusses how one could learn from how FMCG companies build brands in the context of personal brand building. He discusses how authenticity, consumer centricity and choice are critical in building a powerful enduring brand in a certain area.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I want to move back to the point you made, about having a business card with no logo, just your name, which brings us to personal branding. What's been your journey on that front? How have you thought about it? How should people think about a brand? How do you think about a brand in company context and how have you thought about that in building your personal brand?

Prakash Iyer (PI): What works for brands in a product sense, I think, will work equally well with individuals. And maybe there are two or three lessons that come to mind as I think of what can individuals learn, let's say, from a more conventional product marketing perspective. The first is that the brand's got to be true to itself. Brands can't be pretenders. I think, consumers will see through them very, very quickly and that's, I think, a very fundamental rule even for individuals looking to kind of set off on their own or trying to build brands out of themselves. I think it's important to be honest. So, that level of integrity, honesty, for a brand, I think, clearly is paramount.

The second, perhaps, is to try and remember what good brands do well is to look at themselves from a consumer standpoint not from a manufacturer standpoint. I think, a lot of individuals who try and get into advisory, consulting, gig economy kind of roles can start thinking, my experience, my background, my credentials, here's what I can do, which is a very manufacturer's standpoint. I think it's important for us to be able to look at it from a consumer standpoint. How do I change? What value can I add for you? What does this mean for you? A good question a brand will answer is why should a consumer buy me? Therefore, to be mindful that you're not constantly looking at your portfolio of services and offerings from a manufacturer's standpoint but from a consumer's standpoint. I think, we've got to be careful that we don't keep looking at ourselves in the mirror and say, look, everybody, look how pretty I am. I think, that won't take you too far, but if you can actually look out and say, hey, let me try and understand what's happening out there and how do they see me? How does the consumer look at me? Rather than saying, what's my view of the whole world? I think that can make a difference.

DJ: In the early days, how does that feedback loop work? Let's say, if I'm an individual who's set out on that journey. What's been your approach on seeking that feedback? Is it just sensing the pulse or is it more explicit conversations with people to get a sense of what they see in you?

PI: I think, it's a bit of having those conversations, but, more importantly, it's about having the right mindset. I think you can get too keen on telling the world how smart you are, how you have all the answers. Therefore, this desire to walk around with that hammer in your hand waiting for everything you see as a nail. And you don't want to be there. You probably want to go out there and look around and see, ask questions, listen in, and try and get a sense of what is it that's happening out there. And then be willing to say, actually, I don't know or I don't have the answer. The minute you do that, if you're willing to say, I don't have the answer for a few questions, you will discover, you have very powerful answers to some other questions. And that's really where your sweet spot will be.

Which brings me actually to the third bit that brands do well and individuals could learn from, which is, brands don't try and be all things to all people. Brands don't try and serve, necessarily, the lowest common denominator. Brands have something distinctive about them. Brands try and build on that difference, a distinctive difference, which appeals to some people and, by definition, will not appeal to some people. And brands are comfortable with that.

DJ: It's about saying 'no' to a few things and choosing who your audience is, I guess.

PI: That's right. I think, if you can say 'no' to a few things, your 'yes' suddenly becomes a little more interesting. When you say 'yes' to everything, no one believes you anyway.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point about consumer standpoint versus manufacturer's stand point is quite a powerful one. As a services organization or a player in the gig-economy, it is so easy to slip into the mode of "productizing what you do" and lose track of the question that your client is asking. And each situation is so unique and bespoke that unless you suspend your "product mindset" and listen intently, you often don't end up picking up the real problem that the client is trying to solve.

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End of nugget transcription

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- 09.00 Prakash Iyer - The Full Conversation
- 09.01 Prakash Iyer - Playing in the gig economy
- 09.02 Prakash Iyer - The art of storytelling
- 09.03 Prakash Iyer - Building a personal brand
- 09.04 Prakash Iyer - Selecting a coach effectively
- 09.05 Prakash Iyer - Picking the first job after IIM
- 09.06 Prakash Iyer - Career in consumer goods
- 09.07 Prakash Iyer - Shifting your goalpost over time
- 09.08 Prakash Iyer - Unlocking the potential
- 09.09 Prakash Iyer - What they don't teach you at IIM-A
- 09.10 Prakash Iyer - In summary — Playing to potential

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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