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Context to the nugget

Selecting a coach for a leader can be a reasonably ambiguous task. Prakash talks about how we could learn from the world of sport in ensuring that we get a coach who is fit for purpose.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): One of the pieces companies often don't spend enough time on is how they should go about selecting a coach. Often they decide that somebody needs a coach but the how piece is often left relatively unresolved. Given you've been an observer of cricket, what's been your observation in terms of how sports teams, specifically cricket teams, select coaches and the ones that have made a difference? Are there any lessons that can be learnt in the corporate world on the selection of coaches, specific to a situation?

Prakash Iyer (PI): There are two or three things that teams do as they start looking at coaches and there are some lessons in what they also make sure that they don't focus too much on in that search for the right coach. I think, it helps to ensure that the coach's had familiarity with the environment that he will be in. Therefore, it's important to have played the sport at a reasonable level of proficiency. That's important. So, it's not about how many runs you have scored in test cricket or how many hundreds you have or whether you have the highest. It's important that you've actually been in that scheme of things where you wake in the morning, there is a test match, and there is a game to be saved. You understand what it means to lose, you understand what it means to be hit out of the park. So, you've been there. I think, that level of familiarity and experience is important.

I think, they also look for some levels of proven credentials in this ability to coach. A mistake that corporates sometimes make with coaches, and cricket teams seldom do, is to believe that someone who's scored a lot of runs will automatically make for a great coach. That's something that, I think, teams have figured very quickly. So, teams want a coach who's been there at the highest levels, but once you tick that box, it's not about how many runs you've have scored. It's not about saying, oh, he's been such a good batsman, let's get him as the coach.

I think, some level of formal training helps. So, I think, a lot of coaches that you see around today have got formally trained in becoming level 1, level 2, and level 3 coaches. So, apart from understanding the psychology of sport or the psychology of a batsman or a cricketer, you also understand what it takes to coach somebody. What can you teach, how do you train what are some of the tools, some of the techniques that you can use? I think, that's something again that corporates would do well to, perhaps, look at. So, you might get tempted by the fact that someone seems to be the right kind of guy — 'and why's he a good coach. Because, you know, he is very good with people.' But that is not necessarily a sufficient condition to say that this person will make for a

great coach. So, some level of formal qualification/training/familiarity with tools and techniques, I think, can help.

The third thing, I think, that cricket teams do very, very well, is to look for references. So, you might be coming in to coach a team today, but they want to know, weren't you second level coach for the New South Wales team? How did you do there? Then, didn't you spend a summer working with the Middlesex second eleven? How did that go? How did that team do? Then, you try and say, hey, is there somebody in that team we can reach out to, to just get a sense of what was it like to have this person in the dressing room? I think, that level of diligence is useful. I think, I would urge corporates to also perhaps do that as they look at a coach and not, perhaps, get swayed by reputation. I think, it's tempting to think that oh, he was such a big person or she was such a big name in the corporate world, so we've got that person as a coach, wow, we've got a big win here. The euphoria will last for the first few hours before you get that person in. After that, it's about how effective is that coach in working with the coaching.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As a prior search consultant, I sometimes find it fascinating to note the lack of rigor in a lot of companies when they select a coach. At some level, this is no different from a search where you have a set of criteria and you evaluate candidates around it and most importantly, you do industry references around the same set of criteria, have a short-list and get the leader to meet a couple and then pick the candidate. But if you sort of... how people treat executive recruitment from coach recruitment it's often interesting to see the stark contrast in terms of the rigor that applied to the selection process.

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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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