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Context to the nugget

A good education provides a strong starting point at best. Avnish talks about how he has evolved over time through the various experiences he has had and the decisions he has made.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): You went to Harvard Business School. In your experience, what are the three things you wish they taught you at HBS?

Avnish Bajaj (AB): There are so many. I could have a podcast on just what all I have learnt post facto. Now, that is not a ding on HBS, because for me, I owe a lot of who I am today to HBS. You go into a wringer and you come out and you are a transformed person and you can't pinpoint why. And that's what HBS did to me. But I didn't know what leadership really meant, I didn't know what strategy really meant, I didn't know what execution really meant. Now, these sound like standard management one-on-one things that you can teach in business school. Still, it's very hard to figure it out, even in a case method. Simple things like management practices, like you need to have one-on-ones, you need to have things that circle back, align incentives, all of that. It's all theory until you practice. So, I sometimes wonder whether people who go back to these Executive Education might actually be taking away more from it. So, these would fall in the bucket of the three things that technically are part of business school, but actually, can't really be taught. But if you ask me these are not the big things. These are one of those things where I say, you can teach certain things and you can learn certain things. These you can actually teach and people can learn.

Then, there is the people angle, the empathy. The fact that everybody has to figure out their balance of EQ and IQ, which is a continuous journey for most of us. I don't think that can be taught even if HBS tried. The judgement ultimately, life is about judgement. Success or the lack thereof can, ultimately, be traced back to a series of decisions that were made over a point of time or period of time and each one of those is a yes or a no or a maybe (which is the worst answer). The yes or a no is judgement. How do you teach that? But you can learn it. I think, you can learn it by always pattern-matching things that are happening around you and seeing what is a high co-relation to success and where you are co-relating. It's very hard to explain. Therefore, I said, it's something that can be learnt but I think life ultimately comes down to judgement.

DJ: The two questions that people have to answer over a period of time is where to play and how to win. In summary, any headline thoughts on how people should reflect on these two questions?

AB: We had discussed this in an earlier part of this interview, which is the passion, skillset, opportunity framework. I have used it myself. I have seen a lot of people using it. As it turns out, I

was reading a Japanese book by the way, I think one of the best ways of growing in life is to read a lot I think, it is called ikigai. There are four, which is meaning. I remember, my Baazee parting talk was about four pillars of life and now you can always put it in frameworks. So, I do think that where to play is at the intersection of passion, skillset, and opportunity. On a lighter note, if you have passion and skillset but no opportunity, you will be happy but poor. You can go with each of these and you can come up with some optimality. So, I think, at the intersection is where to play.

DJ: And if I may double click on that, skillset often is visible; it is on a CV. Opportunity is often visible; it's the market. How do you decode passion? What's been your experience in figuring that out?

AB: I think, it's the shower test. By the way, we ask this to some of our entrepreneurs. If you had all the money in the world what would you be doing? That's your passion. By my definition, I have all the money in the world now, because I don't need more than that. I would be doing what I am doing. That's my passion. So, to me, that is the test. Now, I would also probably be teaching. Therefore, there's somewhere in the back of the mind that agenda.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What would you do with your time if you had all the money in the world? It's an interesting way of framing the problem and looking at the options in front of you. It's a similar insight that came up in my conversation with the stand-up comedian Papa CJ who pursued an MBA from Oxford and then was a management consultant but then chucked it to become a stand-up comedian. He talks about a similar issue where he says that if you had a billion dollars in the bank what would you do with your time? That's the key question, especially when you are at crossroads. Hope you found the conversation purposeful. I look forward to having you in one of my subsequent conversations of the Play to Potential podcast. Thank you for listening. For more, please visit audioboom.com and look for Play to Potential or subscribe in iTunes. Bye now.

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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