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## Context to the nugget

All of us have had situations where we step way out of our comfort zone. Nandan talks about his experience from contesting the elections in Bangalore and why he moved on from Politics after that experience.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Fast forwarding that journey, how did you think about when to move from this project? And you went to contest the elections in Bangalore as the next step. I am curious about how you thought about that transition.

Nandan Nilekani (NN): What happened was, first of all, I had always said that I would do this thing for five years. It was not like a lifetime thing. I had promised that I would deliver the platform, build the tech, get it rolled out, get applications built like BBT, and we would reach 600 million people. I reached that stage in March of 2014, so that's when I stepped down, after I had fulfilled my commitments. What I realized when I spent that time in the government was that the potential of technology to transform India was not sufficiently internalized by the system, because people didn't come from that background, technological background. Very few people like me were there in the system. I was a big believer that technological transformation was the way to go because that's the only way you are going to fix a lot of India's endemic issues. Many times, I was not able to sell my ideas saying you can do this, you can do that. So, I was getting a bit frustrated with my inability to sell my ideas. Then, I said, maybe I should be one of them. Maybe, if I am a politician, then I will be the decision-making guy, and then I have a legitimacy to say this is the way to do it.

It was an intellectual choice actually to get into politics, but my experience was not very happy. And in that sense, I think that was one transition where I stepped too far, in some sense. It was way out of my comfort zone. After the election campaign, I realized that this was not where I want to be, that I didn't have the leverage, I didn't have competitive advantage in that area. I didn't think I would be very effective. So, I realized, actually, my effectiveness comes from being what I am good at, which is a technology-led transformation agent and use my talents and abilities to solve large intractable problems and make that available to anybody who wants to use it. That was my shift, and then, of course, I explained to you that I was looking for something to do and EkStep happened and then the whole portfolio approach.

DJ: And just back to that transition, for, let's say, leaders and CEOs who are looking for a career in politics or considering a career in politics, any lessons?

NN: Yes, so I'll tell you, it's very simple. A lot of my consensus-building skills, which I'd honed in the government, were obviously useful there. First of all, it's an extremely time-intensive activity, retail politics. There is always this so-called Rajya Sabha route, where you get nominated, but then you become beholden to someone and I didn't want to get into that situation. Then, I said, if I am going to be in this game, I should win an election. That's the rite of passage of that business. But then, it becomes very retail intensive, because in every constituency, there are millions of people. It's a B2C business, it's a B2C kind of thing and everybody wants real-time attention. You can't say, send me an email or call center or something. So, it's very, very time intensive. It's also lots of pressure groups, different castes, religions, this that, all that stuff. Also, I was hampered by the fact that I was not a good public speaker in any Indian language. I don't think you can win in Indian politics unless you are very good at it, being a public speaker in Hindi or Kannada or Marathi or whatever. So, I didn't have leverage. I quickly realized that I was not going to be effective in this.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Three takeaways for me here. One is the criticality of having self-awareness around what our distinctive competitive advantage is as an individual. Having a very clear view on ourselves is often a pre-requisite for us to figure out the canvas where we want to play. The reason it gets hard is that we are often taught to process the outside world but often don't have the ability to take an objective view on ourselves. All kinds of biases start coming in. The second is about being authentic and staying true to yourself without getting distracted by the noise that could often get created when Ego comes into the picture. When you start doing things to prove things to other people, then often funny stuff happens. 3) Cut your losses - Am sure all of us have made our share of career blunders. This is particularly relevant because a lot of us have a certain outside-in view of a career and then there is the path as we experience it. The key, often, is to reflect on this reality versus perception gap and ensuring that we act on it before too much water flows under the bridge. Thank you for listening. For more please visit [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com).

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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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