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Context to the nugget

Follow your passion is bad advice says Cal Newport in his book 'So good they cannot ignore you'. How does one think about options and decisions when passion and pragmatism point in different directions? Atul talks about how one could look at adjacencies and be pragmatic about a career decision by looking at supply-demand trends in an industry that one is trying to enter.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Just talking about success in a field like this, it's a creative profession and at some level it seems like a low odds career.

Atul Kasbekar (AK): Right now, probably yes. Not then.

DJ: Back to the point about marrying passion with pragmatism. So, how should an individual at the cusp today, who feels a lot like you did at that time, how should that person think about taking the plunge?

AK: So, for example, I believe that the only way I can pay back what Gautam did is to essentially pay it forward. In my head, the time that Gautam and Pralhad spent with me is not a debt I can ever repay. So, even if Pralhad calls me for something utterly random, without question, if I am free, I will always honour it and make time to attend. And it's not like, *accha*; I have done eight of them, now we are done. The debt will never be repaid, very clearly, in my head. If someone comes to me, by and large, I have taken the time to meet with them or chat with them, at least on the phone, or review their work or whatever.

I feel that photography is ridiculously saturated right now. There are just too many people and there is just ridiculous undercutting going on and the people who are making money is a very small bunch at the top, which are inherently shooting celebrities. So, what happens is, the celebrity is getting paid 20 lakh, 50 lakh, 1 crore, 2 crores a day and if they say, '*usko bulao*' whatever that person is charging is pocket change compared to what you stand to lose. In that day, you are doing the film, you are doing the stills; just give him what he wants. So, on the day, if that photographer is billing you 2 lakhs, 3 lakhs, 4 lakhs a day, it's par for the course for them. Now, there are a thousand kids out there, established people out there, who are vying for that job, and the level below that is a bona fide disaster.

So, what I am telling people is that look, you know what, if you like photography, that's fine. What's wrong with video? And that is such an exponentially large market that you can do what you love, except its moving. And in the digital world, for example, what's happening is not even funny. The

option for visual entertainment is now — which is a separate discussion — but it really has come on to your TV screen and your iPad and your phone and so on. Somebody's shooting that and it's all video. So, why aren't you there? Having said this, in any profession, if you are at the very, very top and you are so good, then, again, '*success jhakk marte aapke pichhe aayegi*,' whether in New York, whether here, or wherever.

DJ: Back to this point about few people who are working with celebrities, who are commercially making returns. What does it take to get there?

AK: A, you have to be good. B, you have to be in that person's good books. There is a relationship piece, which, actually, earlier didn't exist that much. I mean, they liked you, nice guy *karke*. Now, I find that there are a lot of photographers who are fully *ghusaoed* into their personal lives and they are hanging and whatever. If you are hanging because you are a friend, it's one thing. If you are hanging because, hey bro, I am here. Then, you check up with their managers, and then you suck up to their managers '*Yaar, kaunsa shoot aa raha hain? What's happening? You haven't shot for this brand for a long time.*' Then, call the brand manager over there, '*You know he really shoots with me all the time.*' And what happens is, at that level the brand managers are least bothered unless they are so specific that only X or Y will shoot, they don't even care. They are like, OK, this guy. If they want this guy, this guy. They don't even bother investigating, does he really want this guy.

DJ: Hunger wins, basically. That's the point you are making? If you are hungry enough...

AK: *Nahin*. You need to now be doing a lot of setting to make sure that you are in the mix. This is, of course, assuming that all five, eight, 10, 30 people that are there are all good enough to do the job. And that is the case. They are all good enough to do the job. It is no big deal. Especially, most celebrity photography is so basic that you are doing two days' work in two hours. OK, just hold product, smile, and boom, boom, boom, you are done. So, how hard can that be?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: There were three takeaways for me here. One is the notion of keeping an eye on the macro trend in the industry you are about to join. There is no point you being passionate about a space that is dying or getting over-saturated. You are structurally setting yourself up for failure. Cal Newport talks about this in his book "So good they can't ignore you" 2) it was interesting to hear Atul talk about what it took to succeed as a Photographer. Reminded me of what one of my mentors at McKinsey would often say. She would say that a Services business is often about 3 things CRR - 1) Capability - How good you are at what you do? No running away from that 2) Relationships with the right set of stakeholders 3) Recall - Are you walking the corridors enough for you to be top of mind when a new opportunity comes along. The Third thing that struck me was the notion of paying it forward that Atul refers to in the context of what Pralhad Kakkar and Gautam Rajyadaksha have done for him. It is very easy for us to keep looking ahead and forget the past. There is a quote that is attributed to Kevin Spacey that says "If you are lucky enough to do well, it is your responsibility to send the elevator down"; I like the emphasis on the word RESPONSIBILITY. If this topic interests you, you might like Nugget 1.08 from my conversation with Vijay Amritraj who spoke about a similar theme from his childhood.

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End of nugget transcription

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Atul Kasbekar - 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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