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Context to the nugget

Business Schools (especially in India) often taken in students without prior work experience. Several students that work hard to get into elite business schools often assume that they are job-ready when they graduate. Karthik talks about some of the key elements which are not taught which can have a profound impact on your effectiveness in the work-place

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Three things that they didn't teach you, at two business schools, to drive home the point.

Karthik Reddy (KR): I'll tell you what served me very well, and, I think, I didn't learn them in business school, just me, I think. A little bit of personality and a little bit of iterative learning that helped me understand the world better. One is definitely importance of communication. How you communicate, when, where, why. How actually is the magic sauce? I don't think we paid any attention to it. I think that's all you should teach in business school. How do you deal with different stakeholders in life? If you can do that, you're, like in most business situations, 80% of the way home. You might not do transactions. That's what I said. You can turn down the person. How you turn the person down is the art. How could you not teach that in business school? So, I wonder about that a lot, that's definitely number one.

The second, again it's a personality thing. We should and I don't know how you teach it but I think it's always personal; it's never business. And just the hard learning again, everything can come back to bite you and everything shapes you. So, how does business in this notion that it was described by some Wall Street dialogues of movies that 'it's business, it's never personal,' how was that again not filtered into your education? I mean, it's like going to parenting school and not knowing how to parent. And being told this is what happens in the second trimester and then in the third trimester, but when the baby comes, I won't tell you.

DJ: It's a fundamental disconnect...

KR: I feel very disturbed by that, because, unfortunately, I think, there's a one segment of the audience in the class who might think, this is what we're here for. Bang the table kind of aggressive, alpha male businessman. And I just feel like that might work for you and five people but the rest of the world, what's their opinion of that? So, that's second.

Third, I think, we talked a lot about it in business school, but what we were not encouraged to do is to apply it in practice a lot more. So, your thought frameworks and case studies of what works goes

back to your success stories. To some extent, here and there, a professor will throw in a case study around what didn't work and you have a debate about it. My point is both teach you frameworks of how to see risks and see what works, what doesn't work.

DJ: Still at a cognitive level.

KR: Now, tell me, apply it to everything you are comfortable with and break it down and show me what can be disrupted. So, my point is, it's not about, tell me whether Uber was cool. You take an area or the professor gives an area and says traffic or cabs or whatever is broken in the city. Fix it. Come back with an idea. So, it used to be projected as business plan competitions, entrepreneurship classes. I think, that's bullshit. Everybody should go for it. That's so limiting in thinking of oh, if I can make money out of this, what is the idea?

DJ: Fascinating! It's almost like the difference between reverse engineering what's working in the world versus programming the world for the future, which is a very different mindset. B-School is often about reverse engineering what's working in the world today, which necessarily does not translate to build in future.

KR: I might be paraphrasing but there's a very famous quote: 'The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable man does not and the world progresses because of the unreasonable man'. Again, when you're sitting in business school, why are you educating an entire bunch of 800 people or 500 people to go and play by the playbook and not change it? So, this framework for change, I don't think is driven hard enough, and, I think, it should be part of every course, every curriculum. So, if you say you are doing HR building, where is the world going? Why is a new media outlet today projecting the future of jobs? Why isn't a business school doing it? You're supposed to be the pioneers on this thought leadership. So, it's there, in theoretical frameworks, but I don't think the students are forced to apply it. So, I missed all that. I just feel like, wow, that's all business school should have been about, these three-four things.

DJ: One piece of career or life advice that stuck with you the most?

KR: It took a long time but I think advice has come down to where I am at in life today, which is the clichéd, 'Love what you do and you'll never have to work a day in your life'. Again, once you are sitting in this position, you appreciate the earnings, the income, the learnings from everything you've done, but you wonder, 'What nonsense! Why would I do anything else?' And why isn't everyone in that position? I don't expect anyone to miraculously it's luck of the draw, you can find it in your second year, you can find it in your tenth, you can find it in your fifteenth, but, I think, if you're not striving for it, you're going to be miserable.

DJ: That's an interesting point that segues to the next question, which is that one is about attributing it to luck but is there a way, again if we pick up the transition from the B-school as a moment where you make a choice in direction and then maybe subsequently how we navigate our ship, is there some headline thought on what one could do to maximize the odds of finding oneself in this position of loving what you do?

KR: I think, it's difficult. I don't have an easy solution for it, maybe goes back to one of those things they didn't teach you at B-school. It's a tough one. So, I gave a lot of soft stuff. It's not easy to build into curriculum openly and the curriculum is tough as is. They're trying to teach you every aspect of business that you can possibly cram into two years, and if you go into some of the European schools in one year, so where's the time for anything else? But if you are truly going there to change course, try to find your path, trying to see where you want to be in 15-20 years, shouldn't there be more

application of time and mind to that point? So, at one level, there is, within three weeks of joining business school, the first pre-placement talks and all of that start. So, an orientation is there, but, I think, it's very bland. The company is coming and telling you what it does.

DJ: It's a series of sales pitches...

KR: by the company. Where are the people? Where are the roles? Why aren't there Q&A video/webinars with alums that are actually in the industry? So, why am I not being invited by IIM-B or Wharton to tell them what, post 15–20 years of working, where I'm at and what? The same as the blog post that you are doing. That's fascinating.

DJ: It's one of the objectives of why I am doing what I am doing.

KR: Which is amazing that you are doing it but that's what every B-school kid should be doing it at age 23. So, it goes back to the very first point you asked me: why two MBAs and how? It's the path. I am not saying I'll define the path for you. It's fraught with eight different roads, and some of it is design and some of it is fate. So, you can't judge that on day one, but at least the end goal becomes somewhat nebulously clear. That's shockingly absent in most people's thought process because you are working off a very limited set of data on what that job looks like from the outside and not understanding from the inside. Sometimes, you will talk to your guys who are two years out because the poor guys are sent to pitch. They will say '*do saal pehle*, you got hired out of Wharton or IIM-B, go talk to your kids'. What the hell do they know? It's the guy who's actually spent 20 years that knows. Let him speak passionately. I'm not saying you should diss it. Banking is great, for ABCD, not for XYZ. So, ABCD, sit up on a pedestal and tell why banking is great. Mingle with the person over a drink and say, am I this guy? Do I want to be this guy? No? Let me get the hell out of this banking role. It's as simple as that if you ask me. And a lot of choices I made were like that. I just didn't see myself as a consultant. I didn't see myself as having that discipline, that framework. I think, most people say I am a great advisor. I am a consultant in some sense. But not in that application of how the output is, arguably, fee for giving advice, whereas I wanted it to be a principal role. My wife jokes, now, you give other people money to give advice.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The big takeaway for me from this conversation which resonated with me was the point around the How versus What. The Business School education is often focused around understanding the "What's". This is possibly a little more pronounced in India than other markets. The focus is often on what is Finance, Operations, Finance, etc. Even HR and OB are often taught at a cognitive and a cerebral level. Nobody really dwells too much on the How? How you build relationships, how you turn down an individual? How do you have hard conversations? How do you give feedback? Some organizations have good training programs that address this gap early on. When I look around my cohort from IIMA around the twenty year mark, other things being equal, the people who have scaled up on some of these parameters are the ones who have risen through the ranks in whatever they have done.

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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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