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Context to the nugget

Authenticity is a word that is often used by people in different contexts. Pramath shares his perspectives on authentic leadership and talks about what it takes to get there. He also talks about how he thinks about flexing his leadership style across diverse contexts.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): You used a very powerful word 'authentic leadership'. I am curious about what the word 'authentic' means to you?

Dr Pramath Sinha (PS): I have a very simple definition of that. You have to be authentic in that your so-called perception as leader or your stature, if I can use that word, or recognition as a leader comes from real achievement and not just talk and not just fluff. It isn't just because you are a smart guy or you talk well and you dress well and you are presentable. There are too many such people floating around, and I think the question is, what you have got to really show for your so-called leadership? So, there is an authenticity that comes from having demonstrated that you can get something done.

To me, there's a certain other authenticity that comes from the other aspect of leadership, which, I think, is very important: have you really helped other people to be successful? And then, there's a third dimension to this which is really around how open are you to feedback and change and really pushing yourself to achieve your best potential and overcoming some of the more difficult challenges, having the courage to face your weaknesses and so on. That is such an important aspect of what people say anybody needs to do to become a leader that you can't expect that of others if you haven't put yourself through that challenge. You can't advise others to take feedback if you're not open to feedback. You can't advise others to change their behaviours or mind-sets or attitude unless you have gone through that and seen how tough it is and what personal price sometimes you have to pay.

So, authenticity, to me, comes from those three things: being able to really show that your leadership accounts for some achievement, being able to truly have a record of helping people — and helping people succeed not just helping for the sake of helping — and then becoming better leaders. Finally, having the personal life experience that you can relate to when you're teaching somebody or helping somebody or guiding or coaching them, without which it is bookish, and that person can read it somewhere or watch a Ted Talk.

DJ: You've spoken about the different things you do. I am curious about how you think about leadership in these different environments? Personally speaking, how do you flex your style if you will, for you to operate effectively in these environments?

PS: I haven't given that much thought. In fact, I feel that I have a fairly simple way of looking at leadership, which works in all these environments. So, call it my naïveté about this or single-mindedness about it, but, to me, there is, actually, a general theory that I am applying to these and it goes back to your question about authenticity.

I think leadership, at the end of the day, really amounts to these three things. Number one, how do you deliver breakthrough disruptive performance each time as many times as you can? You can't do it each time is what I have found but at least you can aim to do it in your style. So, say, there's a normal level of performance that everybody has to deliver or is expected to deliver but can I do something that is breakthrough or disruptive? To me, that's the necessary condition. You can have all the other conditions that I'm going to talk about, but without this, you can't be considered to be a leader or somebody who aspires to be a leader has to keep this in mind.

I think, the second thing is, what I said earlier about the ability to inspire other people to achieve their full potential, to become leaders, to be the best they can be. So, how you can help other people succeed is a great hallmark that you need to have as a leader. But you can't just do that, because if you just do that and not achieve some results, then it's a nice-to-have trait.

Finally, this trait of people's ability to take feedback, read their performance on those two dimensions and say how I need to constantly change, evolve. That's where, actually, the question of adapting your style or looking at leadership contextually comes into play, because, you may need to be a different kind of a leader in a different situation. Your strengths, your weaknesses, and your gaps may play up very differently. So, the ability to see that you are not meant for every situation and different situations require different styles of your own leadership becomes very important on that dimension.

So, these three dimensions of breakthrough performance, making others successful, an obsession with personal growth and personal leadership or leading yourself are the three dimensions that I see of leadership. So, when I am assessing somebody, whether it's an interview, whether it's a performance review, or whether it is somebody I am looking up to as a mentor or judging whether they are worth emulating, these are the three things I am looking for. What has this person really delivered? What is their track record of helping, getting other people to succeed? Finally, what is the evidence that they have actually done something about themselves which is different and path breaking, relative to others? I think, these three ingredients don't change very much between different situations. Where the context becomes more important is, OK, so how do you achieve breakthrough performance in building an educational institution versus delivering a consulting assignment or versus launching a new vertical at 9.9. Those contexts are very different, but ultimately being focused on the fact that listen, it's not worth doing if I am not able to hit the ball out of the park, is the mindset that you want to bring in all three situations.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This piece by Pramath reminded me of what I picked up from one of the leaders who would talk about the parallels across Parenting and Leadership. He would talk about three things - Saying, Doing, and Being. He would say that the highest form of leadership was about "being the leader" that you want others to become. No better way of inspiring the people around you. Comparing that

to parenting, he would say that your kids don't listen to what you say or what you do. They look at who you are being in the journey and then pick what they want to pick from that.

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End of nugget transcription

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Context based Leadership: You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Dr. Pramath Sinha - Nuggets

- 14.00 Dr. Pramath Sinha - The Full Conversation
- 14.01 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Current portfolio of initiatives
- 14.02 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Consulting (McKinsey) as a career option
- 14.03 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Transitioning out of consulting (including views on entrepreneurship)
- 14.04 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Authentic leadership
- 14.05 Dr. Pramath Sinha - What consulting doesn't prepare you for
- 14.06 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Vedica Scholars Programme — Nurturing women leaders
- 14.07 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Educating ourselves (and link with leadership of the future)
- 14.08 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Building leadership capability in entrepreneurs
- 14.09 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Personal board of advisors

- 14.10 Dr. Pramath Sinha - Reflecting on the past and the future
- 14.11 Dr. Pramath Sinha - In Summary - Playing to Potential

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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