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## Context to the nugget

Pramath reflects on his journey till date and talks about what has enabled him to get this far. He talks about the role of staying grounded and authenticity in building trust and developing alliances. He also shares his thoughts around where he wants to drive impact and make a difference in the years to come.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** How do you think about the life ahead? How do you think about success? How do you think about terms like legacy? What's your plan for the future?

**Dr Pramath Sinha (PS):** That question can have a very, very long answer. So, let me be specific in how I am thinking about this. I feel like I have been very lucky to have had the opportunity to build some really lasting institutions: whether it was ISB; now Ashoka; it's early days for Vedica but I'm sure that it will survive and persist and do well; now involved in a couple of new universities and I think they will get there too. So, I have sense of fulfilment about having made a difference and created some of these things. But as I look out ahead, I feel like if I am worth what I am, if I can take some credit in building these, then I feel like I need to do something that would impact a much larger section of society.

At the end of the day, these are all elite institutions and they cater to very few; of course, there is, sort of, a broader impact and knock-on effect and spin-on and so on. One is not trying to do ROI calculation, but I am just saying that, if you really wanted to solve for education per se in this country, then the truth is, these institutions will help, but the larger scale problem is humongous. So, I'm challenging myself these days to ask how can the learnings from what I have done be used to leverage, to impact, a much larger section of society and eventually does any of this help me think about effective ways to reach out to people who don't have access to high-quality education? I think there is where my heart ultimately is these days, in pushing myself to think through what I can do that I know from these experiences that can actually impact a much larger section of society.

In fact, I do want to I am saying this for the first time on tape or in public and I do want to sound not pretentious I have some very lofty... I don't know the answer, honestly. And this is a very personal thing that I'm holding myself to more than anything else, to say, if I'm really worth my salt, then should I not be able to move the needle on the larger problem than having created a few examples or islands of excellence?

**DJ:** Given how far you've come, if you had to be immodest for a couple of minutes and really say these are the reasons why I was able to do what I have been able to do, are there two-three themes

about yourself that you reflect upon which have enabled you to deliver the outcomes and build these institutions?

PS: Tough to say, but a few things. I think, my time at McKinsey and my time with Rajat really raised my sights in a way that I don't think was possible. I was this good, middle-class kid from Patna who was ambitious but didn't quite know what was possible, didn't know what potentially can be done. So, I think, that stint at McKinsey and seeing Rajat build these institutions and then he giving me the chance to work alongside on ISB made a huge difference to my raising the sights.

I think, the second thing is that my upbringing in Patna and the school that I went to. When I look at my colleagues from that school and also IIT Kanpur, I have to say that my school friends and my college friends are all very modest, humble human beings and they've done amazing stuff. So, there was something about the milieu that I was lucky to be part of, where you could come out with a very strong sense of entitlement or edges or arrogance, but I never saw that and I still don't see that in my friends from that time. I think, that has always been at the back of my mind as I have gone off to do stuff. I will tell you where it makes a difference, because you might say, well, that's a very nice thing to say but that's what everybody says, it's not so unique. What that does is, and somebody recently said this to me, if you don't forget where you came from, if you don't forget that leadership is actually about never forgetting where you came from, that places you in a position where you can really move mountains. Because you see how far you've come and then you say, my god, if that's what I could do in the last 30 years of my life and if today I have another 20, imagine what you could do from here and wouldn't that be exciting. Not because you want to win an award or prove anything to anybody, but just because it's so exciting to see how far you can come. So, I think that has always driven me more than anything else.

My wife often keeps asking me, why're you running around doing all of this stuff and do you really need to do it? And sometimes, she asks, couldn't you have just been a partner and director at McKinsey like your friends? And there's nothing wrong with either of those options. But to your question, I think, what's driving me is just this excitement of seeing how far you can actually come and what, therefore, could be possible which you don't know.

DJ: Also, going back to one of the earlier things you mentioned, authenticity. Somewhere I do think, knowing where you came from and ensuring that you are grounded also feels a little more authentic and real when people show up that way.

PS: I think, you picked up on a very important point, which is actually the closing point I wanted to make. That authenticity allows you to build collaborations in a way that you otherwise wouldn't be able to build because it naturally allows people to trust you. It enables a huge amount of trust from young to old, from senior to junior to people who you're meeting for the first time. I think, I am good about using that to my advantage, honestly. Of course, part of that authenticity is to not just use it for your own personal advantage. So, I think, that authenticity engenders trust and then if you use that trust to do bigger and greater things that is what allows you to take things forward. So, I think, that was the essence of my point about going back to where you came from, because that ultimately connects back to a seemingly contradictory [point]: you start very modest, but then remaining modest allows you to do very immodest things, which I think has been the biggest learning I've had in this journey.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It was interesting to hear Pramath talk about the distance one has travelled as a source of energy and as an indicator of the possibilities for the future. I have seen that sometimes this distance one has travelled can have an inverse impact on people which either leads to complacency or arrogance or both. I guess the key is the mindset with which we look at the ground we have covered and that mindset can often determine whether it is an asset that helps us go to newer heights or a derailed that comes in the way of further growth and impact.

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## End of nugget transcription

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- 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)
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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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