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Context to the nugget

Zia talks about the journey from being a successful lawyer in a small boutique with 15-20 people to heading a 400 person organization today. She talks about the trade-offs involved in terms of her time and cultural implications as the organization scales.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): As you think about your transition from being a successful lawyer to a successful entrepreneur who has built and institution and reflect on your personal journey as a leader, talk to us a little bit about how you have changed? How you have evolved and how you let's say built your leadership muscle in that transition from being a successful lawyer to a successful entrepreneur?

Zia Mody (ZM): It was a question of taking a call that I wanted to scale, so if I stayed at 15-20 lawyers my entire motivation and mindset of course would have been very different, I would have been a crazy boutique, but I think at some stage my partner Behram and I took a call that we wanted to grow that there was enough opportunity in India for sure and so within 20 years we have grown from 12 to 400 so that's really India's story we grew like India grew but therefor there are mindset changes there are leadership changes, you have to still be a leader that is seem with affection, even though now you cannot remember everybody's birthday and what their kids are doing which is good and you had only 15 lawyers the connect was much stronger and so how do you keep that bond of maybe not intense affection but affection.

DJ: And how have you managed to do that with the team of 400?

ZM: I think I just don't flip, caring, having your doors open listening to someone who is going through a bad life in the marriage space, children are rebelling, mother in law not listening everything, you suppose more because you are a woman, you tend to be a friend, somewhat of a counsellor, definitely a psychologist, there are as many men as women but I think it's a perception that you live with your organization, that you are there. And that it they are really eases the crises either at work or very often at home, you are not going to stand at the door, looking busy and saying yes now what?

DJ: True, moving beyond the transaction and just the case in hand to really talking about, what's top on mind for them and solving for?

ZM: And solving issues very often gone are the days when you just act like an aggressive leader, people can move, people have options, you want to retain people because you genuinely like them and so how do you reflect that if that's genuine.

DJ: And when you reflect on AZB's journey 12 to 400 are there one or two inflection points where pivotal moments if I may say, where you had to take significant calls to really determined the trajectory are there one or two moments in time that you would recall?

ZM: I don't think there are particular moments in time but the thought pattern which one had to get over was exactly this, small or big because a lot was going to change for me personally, there would be a lot of people management. My passion for law would no longer be 100% of my day it would be maybe 20%, 30% of my day I would have to spend a lot of time as you say in getting business and I would love being a lawyer much more than that so those sort of reality checks but the truth of the matter is that in a way it all came so flowingly and I guess it was just simply because the work just kept coming so if the work keeps coming how do you limit yourself to 12? If you go from 12 to 40 then you go from 40 to 70, work keeps coming then you worry that work missed of so you go haunt and get it? And then you keep go haunt and getting it then you need more people, a lot of the decision making in my life was to consciously know that when we moved off from a small firm into the firm of the size that we are today, a lot of things were changed for many of us a lot of my partners who were with me on my journey in the beginning are still here with me, they also reminds about the days when we were all in one room eating cold pizza at 3 o'clock in the morning, that doesn't happened so much anymore, because the pyramid is clearer the delegation is clearer and etc. but you can't also reflect, you can't turn away opportunity, you have to deal with reality you are growing, there's more growth, there's more growth that exciting in an own itself but that comes with the..., change of intimacy in the organization and more of a business-like approach if you like but somehow you try and keep the balance you still try and keep the affection, not only me personally but the pyramid with such and you hope that DNA translates.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What struck me in this nugget was the point Zia makes about taking a call that they wanted to scale up as opportunity in India exploded. She speaks about the fact that her time would move from spending 80% on legal matters to around 20%, remainder of the time getting sucked into other aspects of building and running an organization. On balance, she still wanted to go after the market opportunity and build out AZB and has gone on to build a top-class institution. Thinking through potential shifts in your pie chart of time is critical whether it is a business model/scale choice or during a transition. At the cusp of transition, people often reflect on the opportunity and the pros and cons but often don't think hard enough about what it means in terms of their time and whether they are willing to make the trade-off. For instance, in the case of one of the leaders I was working with was faced with two options. He had had a successful career in equity research and he was considering two options. Option One was leading a team of 100 people and heading Equities for a Bank in India. Option 2 was to be working with a firm where he would have no leverage, would be given a cabin and an assistant and would be asked to gaze into the future. Clearly Option 1 seemed more prestigious on the face of it. But when I assessed him and got to the bottom of what drove this person, we concluded that his distinctive competitive advantage as an individual and source of energy was pursuing thought leadership. With that in mind, he veered towards Option 2. I am not saying he would not have been successful in Option 1. He might have been. But I have noticed that once you cross mid-life, the more you align your work with what your energy drivers are and your competitive advantage, greater the fulfilment and harmony across the various dimensions of your life.

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End of nugget transcription

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Zia Mody - 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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