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Context to the nugget

Rama talks about her attempts to work at the intersection of consumer understanding and business understanding and discusses how she ended up going solo after a long stint in the corporate world. She also talks about how her role models influenced her choice to go solo.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): You worked in market research for a long time and then at some point you decide to go solo and become an advisor, what point of time was that?

Rama Bijapurkar (RB): That was about 20 odd years later, I did it via McKinsey for 2 years, so yes, I worked in market research but I sort of went through, two start-ups in the research business, one was a complete start up with some friends from IIM Calcutta, senior guys. And one was I joined was Marg which is well established which is just had the split within a week of joining so we literally had to build it back because some of the business went away, I think the interesting thing that I did was that, so Hindustan Levers always been my spiritual moment they were very special and so I actually went back to be the insider-outsider and their system so I worked the deal where again I shattered how brash I was and may I still am but I did say to them that you can't stand my irreverence and I can't stand your stretch ache but we love each other, so we actually had a deal where I was the insider-outsider and that another, it meant basically that you've worked in the system, you got the equivalent grade because I said if you don't give me the equivalent grade your system will kill me, where even the towel in the toilet and how I get tea trade depends on the grade so I got all that I was a told to even per person employee but I was not the employee of the system so it was point of full time consultant, what there's enables me to do was to be able to and that's when I realized that there's lots of benefits of not knowing the rules and of you push any system on/off, so I joined their research business for a marriage of convenience or one year after which I would probably take over from the deputy of the business, within two months, a mail was circulating somewhere about the problem it was and on of their directors that come back from Harvard and then I never heard of Michel Portal and nobody told me you don't reply to the messages that come from directors because they are rarefied but I replied to them saying big deal I have worked with a lot of companies, small guys like this and they think differently and the next thing he knew if he someone me my boss was furious and I actually did the first ever competitor analysis on Nirma within the system, which I would not have been allowed to do if I would have been within the system so I realized that if you sacrifice your career path security you can actually get to do a lot more stuff that you otherwise could do and so I went back twice again immediately couple of years after that I went back to do this Annapurna which was later didn't work out but it was a popular food's business and then I went back Invitation to work on his project Millennium so my finest pieces of work have been done in levers, it was like a kid in a candy shop because in those days start-up agencies were

not glamorous even the toilets were dirty, you couldn't call foreign clients or Indian clients to your office you have to be afraid of lobbies and restaurants and hotels, so going to levers where every software you have wanted the ability to go and do the stuff the ability to make presentations to Dr. Ganguly and so on, on the system is just the huge learning and then I did two years of McKinsey because I felt that we were looking that, if you do the quadrants of, high business thinking low business thinking, high business understanding low business understanding and the other aspects is high customer understanding and low customer understanding, Market research companies were high on customer understanding low in business and so I wanted a High-High and I thought consulting might have it and so I went to McKinsey to try and figure it out, of course they didn't have that and it was the very good stint for me and I was bored but I learnt two things one was to put money where marketing mouth is, so how do you module things, shamelessly, fearlessly, put this off shelf make a spread sheet saying and the other was just the formal lexicon of strategy thinking, and as my other mentor told me, he said what you got was the confidence and he said that confidence would not even possible had not been the system I think that's fair. And then I went on my own.

DJ: The related point to this, if we look at solopreneurship as a journey one of the questions that people need to think about is align with the platform versus go completely solo, how have you thought about that and with the journey you have had there are trade-offs there but what's your take on that choice?

RB: I think fundamentally I believe that you have to not evaluate product options you have to look if it fits with the customer needs which is what I always tell people that this is good job or that is good job is look deep inside yourselves and see what your needs are? And then figure out whether something good or not? Because it's that fit that needs to happen, I have spent all my life doing start-up jobs, in big companies in small companies in McKinsey, it was a different kind of start-up job because of the assignments that I had in levers. So I was tired and I was exhausted and my main consumer need was that I never wanted to do something, where I have to get up at, get to work at 9 in the morning because the troupes needs to be set a good example. And also that I never ever wanted to have to take on work that I didn't want to take on and note if the cash flow is going, this was the generation of no venture money so it was brutal all my life you hustle and you hustle, so that's actually what drove it and I said that I don't care about cashing out but what that really want now is, I was tired and I think parenting also does that to you and I just said that I really want about is to do my thing and so that's the idea of solo. But it was a lot of pain because I also wanted to tell you that, I felt that I was misfit in the corporate world and that's why I was walking away and so I have friend who said to me that why don't you figure out three role models of people who you really respect once I had those three M, and its again serendipity how did that three come? Then I said there are guys who don't have any umbrellas, platforms, nothing but they have basically given the world what they have given the world.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It was interesting to hear Rama talk about how she was solving for something that would be high on business understanding and consumer understanding and the world of Management consulting and Marketing Research gave her a high low and a low high combination but she wanted to craft something that was a High on both elements. To use her language of consumer need, having a clear articulation of what is your need and what sort of environments you excel in coupled with an objective view of the career capital you have built till date can inform choices in terms of the road ahead. Just like she says, I have seen too many people look at job options on the surface without reflecting enough on what drives them. To use Rama's language, that is like looking for product fit without adequate understanding of consumer need.

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End of nugget transcription

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Rama Bijapurkar - 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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