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Context to the nugget

Maternity is a critical transition for women and like Anu mentions, you don't know what you don't know in terms of how things will play out. She talks about her lessons from that passage of play. She also talks about how she took stock of options out there when she returned to work post maternity and discusses typical mistakes women often end up making in this phase.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Moving the clock forward, I want to sort come to the associate principal point and I understand that's around the time, you were expecting or you were had your first child so talk to us a little bit about how you thought about your choices at that point how you thought about your different priorities at that point?

Anu Madgavkar (AM): So I have to say that, I never thought about myself as a women consultant or a women professional up until that point so it just wasn't an issue in fact a little anecdote is that when I was being interviewed out of IIMA for my first job, one of the interviews I did was actually with a women who was very senior in her organization the interview was going seemingly well and I was answering some fairly technical question I remember when she suddenly interrupted and she said what will happen after you get married will you still work and I had to say that such a question not even crossed my mind so I sat there like deer in a headlight and I just said I don't even know how to answer this question because I never thought it would be an issue. So the short point is you can't really anticipate what it is like to go through a live stage until you are at that live stage and for me therefor I didn't really think about the option I said let me just go through it have the baby and I was given this advice to everybody to say you don't have to be sure what will you feel like three months down the road or six months down the road, two weeks down the road you don't have to make that decision about when you come back go through it you have not experience this before and the wonderful part about the firm was that they said we are always here and you figure out what works for you don't prejudge and preamp because you have not experience this before and that advice I took to heart so that is exactly what I did the first time I had my first child, I took a year off and then I came back through a lot of different, experimented with a lot of different flexible options but for me the big thing was don't feel under pressure to prejudge or know and it might will have been I would felt ready much earlier so there was no point really trying to.

DJ: Cognitively solve it ahead of experience. And do you want to double click on the experiments? Talk to us about how you thought about different experiments at that stage?

AM: Well I was fortunate that couple of things happened I think one thing was that because I was in the consulting profession paradoxically maybe to what people expected, actually offers you a lot of

flexibility options it is more flexible than any other professions might be secondly I think I was in an environment where there were keen to make this work for me and there for there were no boundary conditions or ground roles, I was told to craft whatever option worked for me so I had a lots of choices and I could figure it out so what were the options? There were clearly one path that said well I don't want to work full time, I do want to work part time but the conventional model of part time which is I work four day I take one day off in the week that doesn't work because children don't follow, babies certainly don't follow that clock so we worked out a much more flexible model in which I would broadly work 60% of my time but have the ability to step back and do whatever I needed to do at the times that more or less worked for me, provided it worked for the team also it was a bit of give and take but it wasn't very rigid so I did that for some time then there came a time where I, my husband was actually living in Honk Kong at the time and I was in Bombay with my baby and I wanted some time flexibility to be able to spend time in Honk Kong and then come back so we crafted something where I would work on a client engagement for a short period maybe three months and then I would withdraw and take off and go to Honk Kong spend three weeks there and then comeback and then do something else so we modularized it that I could take breaks between the work that I did and then there were many other options as well along the way but the interesting thing is that now we have actually given lovely brand names and lots of formalization to all of the options that these are all packaged there are menu of things but we still give people the message that if you want to craft something else which is outside of this sort of combination of this feel free to do that because we think about every women here as a segment of one we are going to solve for you so let's figure out what it will take to solve for you and make that flexibility happen.

DJ: It's interesting you say this segment of one but just taking to this theme of a maternity being a big transition for women I was talking to Zia Mody couple of weeks back and I was talking to her about the leaky pipeline which is much talked about and she's basically as well understood said that the point of maternity is where the point of maximum seepages so just flipping it around, making it maybe a little more general not just McKinsey but what are the typical missed opportunities or mistakes you see women leaders make in terms of how they deal with maternity as a transition any reflections on what you think some of your batch mates or some of your other peers in the industry, your observation on how they grappled with it? Any reflections on the opportunities there?

AM: I think two or three things, one is sometimes they feel under pressure to come back very quickly, now I am not saying that the longer you stay the better it is its certainly not the case because you do get out of the touch and its harder to comeback but at the same time there is certain stabilization of your own personal state of mind and your domestic situation and that kind of stability does takes sometimes a little tight the new equilibrium to get comfortable in that and them come back because if you come back if you just feel under a lot of pressure and want to rush back and you don't have that piece sorted then it's just not very healthy for you, so I think just think about that a little bit the second mistake that I do see people make is this anxiety or its very sort of batch driven mindset which might be a little bit unique to India but there is this sense that I am part of a batch and my peers are getting ahead of me so there is this linearity.

DJ: With a manufacturing date and an Expiry date sort of.

AM: Yes exactly and therefore a linear path everybody is charging down this path and if I am not sort of jumping back on to it and running twice as hard people are going to get ahead of me and that sets me I have lost the race I think you have to break out to that very linear mindset there is not linear path there are a multitudes of paths and you literally have one life to try and do the things that you want so grasp this opportunity get rid of this batch mindset and do the things that you want they may or may not be strictly bench marked with your batch mates but this is your life, so you should explore the things that you want and kind of use this opportunity to do some of those things and I

don't find that a lot of people sort of do that and then the third mistake that we might make sometimes is just thinking about life is a bit about a sprint as oppose to saying, you should have a mindset that says there are a set of a medium term goals for me, it's not about right now, I have to sustain, I have to renew myself, I have to be able to sustain my balance my lifestyle and feel energized and that is what makes me productive and successful over a two year, three year, five year, ten year time frame and by the way I am going through maternity the children are with me maybe for thirty year time frame before you finally let go of them, you don't know when that will happen but we are a net together for a long hall and therefore to think about balance in a little bit with a slightly longer term perspective than a lot of people adopt.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Three takeaways here. First is the notion of you doing know what you don't know. I think the notion of not pre-judging what you will do post the child is an important one. One, it keeps things real but I feel; secondly it takes the burden of decision making off your shoulders, especially when you don't have the appropriate information to take a call upfront. Second is that I find that so often, individuals find themselves at a point of transition (maternity being one of them) where they look at the situation in a binary way. But often there is this solution space of possibilities around options within a company that never gets explored. But the key point here is that like Anu mentions, the onus of solving for that possibility often rests with the individual and not the organization. I see people either not exploring this solution space or being too passive and waiting for the organization to revert with options. The final point that is profound is the notion of being the Segment of 1. I guess that is a point that is applicable for each of us. This is possibly pronounced in India where a lot of us are wired to be competitive and therefore pushed to do well in a relative sense but forget to reflect enough on the different things that are unique to us that makes us a Segment of 1. Having a reflection process and staying true to your journey, your passion and your context can be immensely clarifying as you navigate through life and have to make key choices around transitions.

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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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