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## Context to the nugget

KV Sridhar (Pops) talks about the downside of being competitive in a space like Advertising where it is critical to create a climate where the members of the team can be creative and come up with impactful ideas that work. He also talks about how he has approached learning and his self-development as he has gone through his career.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** If you had to reflect on how you have evolved as a leader as a person, how do you get a person to develop, What's been your approach to your development and what's your thought, what's been your experience on helping other people scale up, what's worked?

**KV Sridhar (KV.S):** I think from 83 or 84 onwards after coming back 84 from that time to till 93, 94 I was fearlessly competitive because somewhere, if you play cricket you have to be like Gavaskar, you can't be a field, you have to do your best work, so come what may never use to let anybody interfere in work which you are doing sometimes even clients also used to go and then fight with them quite a lot, write checks for them if you can't afford I will give you the money, so I used to go to any land to really do that somewhere in our 85 or 86 is where the life took a turn as you are also growing, you became a leader, but a leader who fearlessly independent and to compete with everyone is not a great thing so then I learned, I have read a book how to manage creative organizations which talks about destiny, which talks about Sony Pictures, which talks about a lot of companies 3M a lot of different kinds of companies which involved in a lot of innovation and creativity so one thing what they mention is, you need to create an environment for people to get ideas so how do you really create an environment for people to really get the Ideas then it just stopped with that line in my head then I tried to figure it out saying that, why people do their best in workshops not at work situations in work situations what happens is if you have setups 15 people working on a project for you each one of them way to think one hour, so they can put one idea on paper while human mind is capable of connecting billions and billions of images you cognate may be 5 to 10 of them but you only put one on the paper because you are eliminating the rest by pre-empting client may not like it, my boss may not like it, my bosses boss may not like it, somebody else, consumer may not like it, somebody else may not like it so there are a lot of inhibitions in that and people are pre-empting all the time in situations, in a workshop situation where you are free after two drinks, you can say anything there is no boss there is no subordinate and what happens in brain storming, the dynamics is, you see something which may not be the right thing and then you say stupid if you want to do that you should do it this way, so somebody builds on that and then somebody builds on that so at the end of that entire exercise of a workshop, you will come up with five, six great ideas within a day or two the same team work has not happened in an agency and then you may not get nuggets because people are chopping them on each other's ideas so somewhere as a leader you said you

must create an atmosphere where people are free so demolish all the designations there is only a copy writer, a creative director, and a creative leader, which is an ECD, demolish all the designations and then money will be paid a copy writer may get paid more money than a creative director, so hierarchy has taken over, taken completely a back seat and they said that's only for functional need a creative director is a functional need and then what he does is not necessary that he is the best creative guy, he manages creative resources well, he goes and then sell it with the clients with conviction, he puts a great vision about how to bring the idea come alive, his job is different as a copy writer if you have certain skills and then you can, so dealing the compensation from what they do to what they bring into the party so this and also an open structure where people can come work at any time, go anytime there is no pressure on people if somebody were not to do his work you say fine, just go home and then take a break, you can't ask somebody to work late for three days in a row and then have a fight with his girlfriend and then do his best the next day morning can't happen and advertising is a team game, it's not an individual game so a lot of people even now also play as an individual's it's a team game that's the reason why you need so many people, it's not like manufacturing, you put on the button and then today 30 cars I deliver, I make 30 cars only they make then don't make 31 out of 29 advertising is not like that advertising creative people are so insecure and they need to be, you have no idea next day morning will you get an idea or not? That's the worst feeling gone, whatever you have done next day, so how do you make them feel very secure? And then how to really make them feel that it's ok if you don't do it somebody else, you need team for that, the same way when you have a team and then you are making the team work, so I think the team work, giving people freedom, understanding them little beyond the work and then their motivations why they are doing, what they are doing all this will really help in shaping then so a lot of people have become very successful working with me and they also made me very successful unless they are successful you cannot be successful, with 400 people, what can you do? With 12000 people in Sapient what can you do? You can't do anything unless they do so you can only as a leader create an environment for them to excel and give them confidence to excel and each one will find their own formulae to excel, I think that's where to me it worked.

**DJ: What's been your approach to learning through your phases of life?**

KV.S: Insecurities, vulnerability, because the worst nightmare is to open your mouth and be foolish and as I said if you are not relevant to your children, you are not relevant to anyone, so the first thing you need to learn is what are the technologies which people are adopting and then you try and then see and what are the technologies which marketing people are and what are the instruments, what are the tools, what are the measurement systems which they are using and then you say that what are the things which are happening whether java 2 is better or java 1 is better, so what is better? What is that? HTML5 is far better or something else so evaluation criteria and then what they do and what is programming, how does programming work whether it is C or C+ is the basics which you learn so one is, you wanted to catch up because in advertising you might be a guru working for 37 years everybody will listen to you in technology world I am the highest paid trainee, so when you are the highest paid trainee their expectations is also very high, you are going to change a lot of things, you know nothing and then you are a trainee so learning again with a lot of, Sapient is a wonderful and wonderful people whether they are technologies stuff, whether they are Scientists or Data Scientist, whether they are programmers, I used to take them out have lunch with them, try and understand what they do? How they do? And what are the new things which are happening what are the sources through which I can really learn, I used to wake up in the morning crack all of them learn something about social topography, how does social campaigns are mounted, how does technology is moving, how does commodities work and what is nascom, what do they do, how does things change so all that from that vulnerability of I don't know, will I look like a foolish guy? Making a shift and then falling flat, so you need to do some homework to catch up with then otherwise you

are not going to be of any use to the company which has hired you and then the companies which are going to hire you to solve their problems which are clients.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What Pops says mirrors a recent study by Google that studied multiple teams and said what differentiated the great teams from the average ones. It turned out that the secret sauce was Psychological safety – for the team to feel that they were in a space where it was OK to make mistakes and for them to bring their whole selves to work. It was also fascinating to hear Pops talk about his insatiable curiosity in the way he learnt about technology and how he went about reading and meeting people to quench the thirst. Something that we all could do well to emulate as we strive to stay relevant in this ever-changing world.

## End of nugget transcription

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## KV Sridhar - Nuggets

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- 23.01 KV Sridhar - Convergence of Strategy, Creative, Tech and Data
- 23.02 KV Sridhar - Early Childhood and Dyslexia
- 23.03 KV Sridhar - Early career choices - Medical Rep/Painting/Advertising

- 23.04 KV Sridhar - Rejecting 3 jobs and painting in Goa
- 23.05 KV Sridhar - Transitioning from Advertising to the Tech world
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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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