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Context to the nugget

Jay shares examples of three leaders (PV Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi) who have driven significant change despite the challenges that came with the implementation. He talks about how great leaders use a window of opportunity or a crisis to quickly shift gears in dramatic fashion to drive seismic shifts.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): How do you think about excellence in the context of Politics?

Bajjayant Jay Panda (JP): Ultimately politics is about improving a lot of people, improving the conditions of our voters and our country and not all politicians work like that, many of them work for their own benefit rather than for the national benefit but there are many examples of politicians who have done the right thing so take the example of P.V. Narasimha Rao he has spent decades being an apparat cheque of a particular party and in an odd set of circumstances suddenly pitchfork into the prime ministership and he inherited huge crisis, where India was about to default on its external payments he used the crisis superbly to bring in reforms which either had been not thought about or even had been thought about were not implemented by earlier leaders so that was the fantastic thing he did and you can see the results of that even quarter century later that was a turning point take the example of Vajpayee another political leader who spent decades out of office and only two years at the end of his career as prime minister he shifted the gears with very dramatically on a particular aspects which meets this question of yours Indian politics had always been from independence very populist because we went from British Raj where the publics opinion didn't matter to suddenly public opinion mattering even when the country was 75% illiterate and 75% poor and so populism was the call of the day for many decades investing in hands out rather than on long term investments Vajpayee shifted the needle dramatically when he started this massive infrastructure program two fold, one was the golden quadrilateral, highways connecting the entire nation and the second once was the PMGS (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) building asphalt roads to the villages so today more than 90% of all Indian villages have as fault roads which has transformed their lives because just to take an example in Orissa, during the Monsoons for three to four months every year large sections of the populations used to be cut off from the civilization because everything around them was mud, they couldn't go to the local school, they couldn't go to the local hospital, they couldn't go to the market 10 Kilo meters away, now Vajpayee shifted the needle by taking a bold gambit it didn't pay off immediately but if you look 20 years later it has paid off hugely for anybody that spends time in rural India, you can recognize it, more recently the GST, now the GST creates the unified market although many people have advocated it, Manmohan Singh when he was prime minister and others but it was under the Modi government that it happened and it took enormous grit and enormous commitment to make it happen, it didn't happen on auto pilot

it required a lot of scheduling and twisting of arms so that is an example of using political capital to bring about a seismic shift with all the difficulties of implementing GST and the initial hurdles will pay in the future when you look at the benefits that it brings about because for the first time India becomes unified domestic market, in the US it happened again many decades after their independence when they passed the interstate commerce act and this removes a lot of peculiar inversions in our economy, when we don't have unified market which we didn't until now it used to be cheaper to send raw materials send abroad to get it processed into finished goods and them reimport it back whereas value addition was going elsewhere the profits were going elsewhere we were just consumers, that inversions get dramatically rectified. So these are three examples of leaders using either political capital or a crisis or a particular window of opportunity to shift gears in a very dramatic fashion.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Two big takeaways for me here. One is that great leaders have a knack of when the time is right and whether it is a crisis or a fleeting moment of opportunity, they have an intuitive sense of when to change gears and move forward with their ideas. The second is that some of these decisions can only be judged in a longer time horizon. We often focus on the short-term pain and the disruption that some of these moves cause. It is critical to have an appropriate long term view (and I guess onus is on the leader to provide that perspective to the wider community) while judging the effectiveness of an ambitious decision or a project.

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End of nugget transcription

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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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