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Context to the nugget

Amit discusses how he thinks about hiring and creating a nurturing climate for his team to deliver performance. He also shares how he invests time with each of his colleagues and helps build their capability. He also talks about how he handles exits from Bain Capital. He talks about the realities of a corporate pyramid and stresses the importance of handling the people that don't go up the pyramid with empathy.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): In an environment where you are leading people who are super smart, type A, strong points of view how do you see the role of leadership?

Amit Chandra (AC): I have been very clear and this is something I have learnt from Hemendra early on which is its very important to do a couple of things for your own sake especially if you love the institution that you work for, you must hire people smarter than you and must try to foster having a great operating environment and why I said it's just not good for the organization but for your own sake is that it lands up being great for your own growth Hemendra explained to me why that's the case and the fact that I am sitting and having this conversation with you here while I have a team working at Bain Capital is good testament to that, I would never be able to do what I am doing for a few days of week if I didn't have a great team at Bain capital. So my own personal objectives would be massively compromised if I did not have high quality leadership, which I had nurtured right from the start because it takes time for people to get there, you can't switch on and off leadership like a spigot all these guys have three managing directors now in the office it takes 8 to 10 years to build that kind of a bench all these three guys are guys who were I hired in the first year or the second year of the office opening so these are seeds that were sown at that stage.

DJ: And if I may be double click on that apart from technical skills what do you look for and what did you look for at that stage?

AC: I am not overly analytical when I hire talent, some of my guys tell them they, when they hire unless I am probably the easiest recruiter relative to all of them for me actually I focus a lot more, my interviewing style is a lot more focused on the personality of person the persons likelihood to fit into team culturally, much more is the persons well rounded, I look for fire in the belly and look for the person overall going to be smart, I am not looking for the genius, sometimes our guys look for the genius and I don't look for the genius, is landed up that all three are exceptionally bright but I think at the end of the day broadly what I look for is people who are smarter than me, which is not very tough, I am generally above somewhat average but I am not exceptionally bright so I look for people who are broadly smarter than me, who can add something to the group, and then I try to

build a good high quality working environment in which people have the ability to sit around the table and have a good conversation, culture of the office will be good, they will always feel that there is opportunity to grow, it is always be a meritocracy and at the end of the day they shouldn't feel like getting up in the morning and coming to work broadly if people feel that much has achieved you are home, you don't have to complicate it, people try to bring in all these extra tools and make it extremely fancy, I think if you keep it by enlarge simple I think it works so that's what I have tried to do and with that its broadly worked.

DJ: Is there anything to be said about creating a sort of a nurturing culture or apprenticeship culture in an environment where you end up hiring very smart people? Are there any challenges to be watched out for?

AC: No, I think what you need to do with each person which I try to do is you need to make sure that they feel that you are investing in them so I do try to make sure that I have tried to at least take interest in their investments that they don't think that it is purely a transactional where there purely to fulfil a job which they could have filled at any other place that they have brought visibility that they are part of the mission of the organization and I have tried to make sure that there's we always palms up that there's no surprise that they will have I think that's very important so over the years the one thing that I have been extremely focussed on as an organization is that no person who has joined the organization not one will ever leave the organization without landing on to your feet, the way private equity works or consulting works or investment banking works the fact is that everybody cannot get promoted it's a pyramid, everybody knows this so you recruit certain number of people and the way progression works everybody cannot go up the pyramid with that fact how do you treat people who do not go up the pyramid is absolutely essential and that is a critical philosophy that I have tried to manage in the organization on the differential basis to make sure that people who are not moving up have early visibility about their prospects, point number 1, point number 2 that we go out of their way to help them land on their feet that we move heaven and earth to make sure that they are, that when time comes that they land in such a way that they feel not just the organization but individually the leaders with the organization did everything possible to help them I think is absolutely critical if you are able to do that then you have done achieved a couple of things, one is everyone in the organization, you have sent them a signal on how you want to treat each person but second you actually created ambassadors even if they added competitors so I think that is the critical philosophy at least for me.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This segment reminded me of my last few weeks at McKinsey. When I decided to move on from the firm, they went out of the way to open doors for me, gave me a transition coach who would help me think through the next steps and made introductions to key places given the relationships they had. I have tremendous personal gratitude for Ramesh Mangaleswaran, who is a Director in the Chennai office who prodded me to think about Executive Search as a career option, something that I hadn't even considered at that point in time. Life would have been very different if not for this nudge that came in at such a crucial juncture for me.

When I do my leadership development work, I find that if I want to get a pulse of the culture in an organization, I get a really good picture when I talk to some of the alumni. How people on the way out are treated gives me a sense of the kind of human beings that inhabit a certain place. How people treat you when their fortunes are not tied to you is a pretty good dipstick into the culture of an organization.

Thank you for listening. If you are new to the podcast and want to get a sense of the nature of content that is covered, you might want to go to YouTube and type “PlaytoPotential Highlights from 2017”. I have tried to capture the key takeaways from my various conversations last year with leaders across disciplines. From people such as Zia Mody, Nandan Nilekani, Viswanathan Anand, Vijay Amritraj, Amish Tripathi, Vinita Bali and the like. For more, please visit playtopotential.com where the content is organized by nuggets and they are tagged by themes so that you could get perspectives from multiple individuals on a topic that you care about. If you want to listen offline say during a car ride home or during airplane travel, you could also access the Podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Saavn and several other podcast apps but that may not give you the flexibility to navigate across speakers by theme. If you find the content purposeful, please go to iTunes, rate the show and share a review. It will help others discover it.

End of nugget transcription

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Amit Chandra - 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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