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Context to the nugget

Roopa talks about how she drifted into CRISIL and how she was not necessarily career oriented in the early years of her professional life. She talks about the notion of focusing on excellence and on topics that are outside the realm of responsibility and how the culture at CRISIL ensured that her efforts were noticed and rewarded. She also talks about the transformative impact that one of her overseas stints had on her in terms of developing a “bird’s eye view”.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I understand from listening some of your earlier conversations, that you say that you don’t necessarily call yourself a career oriented or an ambitious person in the initial passage of play and you talk about focusing on excellence and doing things well that other couldn’t do so talk to us a little bit about your approach may be a first decade or two but more importantly with the wisdom of hindsight if you have approached it any differently?

Roopa Kudva (RK): I think my approach was also shaped by the organization I happened to be in I would say that in the first two decades of my career I pretty much enjoyed myself and went with the flow would be a good way of describing it, I stumbled into Crisil in completely unplanned manner primarily because I was looking for a job that would enable me to be in Bangalore, where my husband was moving and so while all of that was unplanned the moment I actually joined Crisil, I realized that this can be something really big. And they were pretty heady times in Crisil those days and it was pretty much a start-up, there was the excitement of evangelizing a concept in the country there was no regulatory support the whole concept of credit rating it was getting acceptance for the new concept, what was also new about the company at that point in time was that it was not a public sector company and yet it was not owned by any promoter it was wide institutional shareholding, so it was pretty much like we the early team were the owners of the company, the second distinctive thing which was I think enabled me to really sit back and really enjoy the journey was the culture in the company, I think right from day 1 Pradip Shah instituted a culture which was quite unique at that time which is that the most important decisions of the company which was the rating decision was made in an open forum anyone in the company could attend the rating committee meeting and see how the decision was being made which was a bit of the contrast to my earlier experience in IDBI where I would evaluate, do the analysis put together an investment memo and then it would go up and then the decision would be made at a committee or by a group where I even wasn’t in the room, behind closed doors so I think that was backed the culture where it was opened and what mattered more was the power of your analysis than who you were in the organization was I think very inspiring and very motivating and I think therefor I would say it enabled all of us who were there at that point in time to give our best and because it was a start-up and it grew very fast our careers grew along with the company, so I just think we were very fortunate and

that enabled me to I think just step back try and do that I could and then go with the flow so to speak.

On the second part of your question about trying to focus on my strengths, I think I very early in my career realized that there was no point in trying to be best in everything and again taking the example of Crisil we had truly outstanding analyst in different sectors, I would call myself a good analyst may be even a very good analyst I wouldn't call myself an outstanding analyst, there were so many people around me who were better than me. And so then I said to myself that if there are all this great people why would I want to be yet another person trying to do what this people are already doing so well and instead I said I realized that there were things that I could do the others probably couldn't do as well and it was things like communicating with teams, it was getting teams together to work towards the common goal it was working with others, it was having the ability to step back and form a picture of what needed to be done with the business for example which I thought were my strengths and it was the ability to conceive new product new ideas for the business and I think while I continued doing what I had to do I think over the years, unconsciously I started focusing more on some of the things I believed I could do differently from the others.

DJ: To be just a little provocative here some of these clearly add value to the business but often aren't visible from the outside like let's say fostering or collaborative culture, I have come across people and the organization who would do a great job sometimes it doesn't get noticed, so at some point in time they start wondering is it a good use of time and they pull back so were there any choices that you had to made or the calibrations that you had to make along the way?

RK: I think I was fortunate to have leaders in the company who were truly outstanding and truly inspiring and I remember an occasion when I was fairly junior in the company and as I said we were a start-up a lot of systems and processes were evolving and even though I was a rating analyst I had some time on my hand, so I went and did an external survey of performance appraisal systems in different kinds of companies, I went and interviewed ten of my classmates at IIMA, who were working in different companies and I came back and pulled together on the basis of those conversations performance appraisal system for Crisil, no one asked me to do that, no one knowing that I was doing it, and I sent it up to what was our management committee at that point in time and which included Ravi Mohan and then I forgot about it for two weeks and to their credit not only that they have a look at it but then I got the call from Ravi Mohan saying oh this is terrific what you have done and we are going to adopt it and so the fact that there were I think I was singularly fortunate to be in an environment where people were kind enough to notice and these things got picked up and I think that motivates to try and do more and try and do more new things.

DJ: At some point in your journey at Crisil, you have had a stint in Paris with Stander and Poor and that changed your approach to career building, so am curious about what that switch might have been?

RK: I wouldn't say it changed my approach to career building, I think it changed my perspective I think the best shift in one's career comes when you are able to make the transition from what I call a worms eye view to a bird's eye view so you make that shift and you are able to step back and look at the big picture, I think the fact that I moved out from India was living and working in Europe and evaluating banks in 15 different countries allowed me to really develop that outsiders view, so if I was evaluating banks in Israel for example I knew nothing about Israel it enabled me to think more strategically about the economic context of Israel and how it impacts banks rather much better than I would have be able to do at high being sitting in Israel living in Israel and evaluating a bank and I think that shift and lens which happened because I moved out and I did this global analytical role helped me tremendously I think it made me really move a step up, it wasn't what I expected to

happen I just thought I would go and learn more about banks in another countries but I think it enabled me to develop a far greater strategic orientation than I had when I went in.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Couple of things struck me here:

One is that sometimes the smallest of things you do in your company can have a profound impact on culture, motivation of staff and development of the team. Roopa talks about rating decisions being made in the open in CRISIL. It is a simple point but it has a profound implication on how people think about hierarchy and also exposes junior team members on some of the nuanced aspects of decision making early on in their career.

Second is the notion of how one can have a worm's eye view and a bird's eye view as we grow through our career. It could come from experiences we gather as we move along (Roopa talks about how her stint in Paris gave her a strategic view across multiple markets). It could also come from initiatives we undertake early on in our careers beyond our domain (Roopa talks about reaching out to 10 of her batch mates to get an understanding of how performance appraisal worked).

As we grow in our careers, I guess we need to take proactive charge of depth in a domain but also breadth of perspective across various topics and themes.

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. 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. Google has recently launched an app for podcast listening on Android platforms too. If you went to playtopotential.com, you would also have the opportunity to listen to multiple voices curated by a topic. Play lists topics include – Reinventing Self (which is about how people changed trajectories significantly), early formative years where leaders talk about how their childhood has influenced them profoundly, Insight on career paths (various professionals talk about the ups and downs of their career and how individuals should think about embarking on that path)

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End of nugget transcription

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Roopa Kudva - Nuggets

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- 29.02 Roopa Kudva - Early formative years
- 29.03 Roopa Kudva - Growing through the ranks at CRISIL
- 29.04 Roopa Kudva - Transitioning to a General Management role
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- 29.06 Roopa Kudva - Flexing leadership style at Omidyar Network
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- 29.08 Roopa Kudva - Women Leadership - The barrier that doesn't get spoken about as much
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- 29.11 Roopa Kudva - In summary - Playing to Potential

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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