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Context to the nugget

Roopa talks about how she took stock of options after her successful run in CRISIL. She talks about the process she went through to first eliminate what options may not make sense for her before she ended up choosing to join Omidyar Network. She talks about having informal discussions with ~45 people over a 9 month period to get directional clarity on what might make sense for her.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving along Roopa Talking about the fork in the road when you joined Omidyar how you took stock of your career after possibly around 23 year stint in Crisil, give us a sense of how you thought about options at that point in time, what else could have been a path way and how you thought about Omidyar network?

Roopa Kudva (RK): So I had spent 22 years in Crisil, 7 years as the CEO, I just loved the job and for years I said that it is the best job in the country and I really believed that it was the best job in the country I think it gave you a ring side view of anything important that was happening in India and it gave you a platform to shape where India was going in so many different ways, so it was phenomenal, so we had a ratings business, we had the global analytics business we had an small and medium enterprises business which where we have evaluated one lac enterprises and we had a policy advisory business so it was a very powerful portfolio and I loved what I was doing and I was very grateful to the company, I think the first emotion when I think about Crisil is really gratitude because I think it made me who I am it gave me the opportunity and so I was very grateful to everything I had turned 50 and I had already been a CEO for 7 years I had another 10 years to go and I said to myself that if I had to stay for another 10 years I would have been ended up being a CEO of a 17 years and I don't think that's good and I don't think that's good for the company it's not good for me and I also figured that in fact all I wanted to do is something else again it was not clear what I wanted to do this would be a good time because I won't get a clear runway to do something completely different not knowing what it would be and so I had a chat with my board and said I want to leave but I am not going to leave immediately, I will manage a smooth transition because I don't know what I am going to do next and to their credit they saw the point of what I was saying of course it took nine months from the time I decided to the time I left just because we were public listed company we actually disclosed as soon as I made the decision that it is my intent to leave at some point and it took nine months and because it was public knowledge that I was going to leave the committee to succession and all of that one of the people contacted me was someone who is now my colleague at Omidyar network and I remember when they called me my first reaction to him was why are you calling me I don't even know what impact investing means? And from there the more I got started talking to the forks here I realize that this is an organization which is don't

outstanding work but more importantly it had which I didn't quite understand at that point in time what exactly this whole combination of investing in grounds was,

DJ: And what was your colleague's response on how he/she called you?

RK: I think he said someone told us that you might be interested or something like that in at least talking to us but what really made Omidyar network very exciting for my perspective was just the quality of the team and when I went to the website and I looked at the people who were in the firm and I looked at what they had done and their background I said to myself that each one of these people could be doing anything that they wanted to and the fact that they have chosen to be here and the fact that they have chosen to work for Omidyar network said something about the firm so that got me interested and that later further conversation for me.

DJ: The reason why I asked this is this is also time where people often go after scale in terms of the number of people they want to lead and large financial and from a people scale perspective is probably a factor of 100 or if not somewhere there, it's a big drop from the number at Crisil to Omidyar, if not Omidyar what else you think you could have ended up doing at that stage?

RK: The honest answer is I don't know, I only knew that I wanted to leave Crisil and I wanted to do something completely different I didn't know what it was and I said there will be a process of discovery by which I would figure it out but my entire energies at that point in time were mentally coming to the decision that I want to leave Crisil because it was, I didn't think of Crisil as my job, I thought of it as my company, so even to come to a final decision to leave was a big decision there were many people I had conversations with during this 9 month period but everything seemed there was the usual stuff some private equity some policy some work and some large, I didn't see myself as a person working in an NGO I didn't think I was cut out for that and so it's really hard for me to answer the question of what else, who knows maybe I might have done nothing, I don't know but this really appeal to me, and you are right I think when I joined Omidyar network I knew I would love the organization, I knew I would love the work and I was inspired, truly inspired by what the organization was doing. My biggest concern was for me in the sense that I wasn't confident at that point in time that I would be able to make the transition from a 4000 people company to a company which is globally 150 people and 15-20 people in India at that point in time how would I handle that? It may seem silly but how would I handle the fact that, I never sat in an open office would I adjust? I wouldn't have for day to day support the so called office of the CEO with two people figuring or doing the research and someone doing the PowerPoint desk, it may seem minor but those were the kind of apprehensions I had about whether I would be able to make those shifts, I was less worried about how easy would it be for me to understand investing or early stage entrepreneurs or non-profits I had a greater confidence that I would be able to figure that part of it out but the smaller things were the bigger apprehensions in my mind.

DJ: Back to that inflection point Roopa again with the wisdom of hindsight for leaders who are at that cross road who takes stock of life where they are, any insight into how they could thoughtfully get to that next inning

RK: There was a friend who gave me a really good advice when I had decide to leave Crisil but had no clue about what next and she said to me go out and talk to people and you will be surprise to hear how people perceive you, when you go out and start talking to people just to understand what is out there, you will be astonished and then you will have clarity and I actually did that, because there were so much time and I was doing the succession and because in Crisil, I was just fortunate to have a set of clients who were all either policy makers or regulators or CEOs of company and I had the platform to interact with them and everyone knew that I was going to leave so they all called up and

said lets chat etc. and so I would go and have a cup of tea with and I did this with about 45 people and over the 9 months and it was just amazing as my friend have told me the insight that I got and I think the first clarity what I got was what I did not want to do and I think that itself become clear to me through these conversations where people said why don't you do this or we think why don't you join us? And that gave me clarity on what I did that helped in the elimination process in my mind I don't want to do this and after that I think it became much simpler I knew there was a small subset of themes that I wanted to look at and that small subset of things was where can I use my skills and capabilities and apply them on a wider platform to bring about some kind of change and didn't know what kind of change it would be in India, so I just knew that part of it and I came through to that realization through these conversations and a process of elimination and then it was serendipity Omidyar caught.

DJ: Very profound advise that your friend gave and maybe just sticking with it, talk to us about what you did not want to do at that point in time, what were the themes there?

RK: So for some time I actually toyed with the idea of doing stuff in government, with the government and there were someone who gave me really good advice and he said to me that you got to realize that you are not the kind of person I don't think you are the kind of person who will succeed in government and he gave me the reasons why? And that was insightful and that was valuable advice from a very senior of which I am very grateful he gave me because I think he was right in what he was saying so I knew that much though it was a something that I would have liked to do I realize I wouldn't be successful given nature of my personality, I thought that other kinds of things were doing strategy types things in large business group etc. I didn't think the traditional corporate jobs be at leading businesses, strategy innovation, those kinds of things and a corporate setting didn't appealed to me because I said to myself, what I have currently is better than any of that, actually it was a pretty long list which was very easy to eliminate very quickly and at one point when I faced with the it was clarifying but it was also there was a point where I said, maybe I will end up doing nothing and then I said to myself OK that's OK as well but that's why I think there was this nebulous idea that was forming of this wider platform, impact etc. without quite knowing and I think the fact that the call from the Omidyar came at that point in time helped it all crystalize.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I should mention that there are a couple of structural sub-optimality's in the transition process in 90% of the situations. Especially when we are talking about transit at the highest level.

First sub-optimality is around not having a window for seeking market feedback; Here Roopa talks about having a 9 month period where the organization and the world around her knew that she was moving on from CRISIL. That gave her the comfort to have conversations with people around her and seek feedback around potential direction. In several situations, leaders often don't have that window or don't create that window for themselves given the sensitivity of the conversation. They get a Search Consultant call and they have their current job to protect. So, they don't get that feedback.

The second suboptimality, I have noticed is that in your working career, you get tonnes of feedback around what you are good at and what you could do better. But nobody really gives you feedback on the canvas where you will be the best fit, which is actually the question you are grappling with when you are at a transition. Or in other words, you get feedback around the question "How to grow" but the real question you are grappling with is "Where to go";

In my observation of leaders who are thoughtful about these transitions or in terms of what shows up when I am working with a leader in transition as part of my Advisory practice, I find that mining for this insight from the people that know you well on the personal and professional front immensely revealing. And we often tend to label ourselves using certain lenses but people sometimes frame the opportunity in a totally “out of the box” way.

One of my earlier guests was Atul Kasbekar (AK) a celebrated photographer and producer of the National Award Winning film “Neerja”. To digress for 10 seconds, his career is an interesting one. He was studying Chemical Engineering at UDCT, arguably one of the best Chemical Engineering colleges in the country, he quit that to pursue photography in the US and came back to become one of the most successful photographers in the industry.

When I asked him about the transition from being a photographer to a producer, he spoke about a piece of feedback he got from one of the people around him he trusted

AK: “I mean I have more of a friend who is a spiritual guide and he lives in Bangalore and he was saying that this is the excellent space for you because what you may not see but what he sees and it actually turned out to be quite true, he says you know you actually a very habitable platform for people otherwise who would never meet each other to be pulled on to and to co-exist and work in a harmonious way and be able to create.”

DJ: Like Atul Kasbekar says, sometimes, the answer lies in our blind spot. Sometimes when you get this feedback from the world around you, it is framed in such a way that it opens up new pathways as you explore possibilities for the future. And this does take time. I also tell people not to rush this process of gaining directional clarity.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Atul Kasbekar that is referenced: [Entrepreneurial pursuits beyond photography](#).

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Roopa Kudva - Nuggets

- 29.00 Roopa Kudva - The Full Conversation
- 29.01 Roopa Kudva - Omidyar Network and innovating for next Half Billion
- 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
- 29.05 Roopa Kudva - Choosing career direction post CRISIL
- 29.06 Roopa Kudva - Flexing leadership style at Omidyar Network
- 29.07 Roopa Kudva - Developing a sense of judgment
- 29.08 Roopa Kudva - Women Leadership - The barrier that doesn’t get spoken about as much
- 29.09 Roopa Kudva - Perspectives on Success
- 29.10 Roopa Kudva - What they don’t teach you at IIMA but should
- 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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