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Context to the nugget

Neera talks about the distinction between Needs and Wants as people think about a career in Social Impact as against the corporate world (although the lines between the two are being blurred). She also discusses some of the real challenges when people with a long successful tenure in the Corporate world transition to the Social Impact world. She shares her perspectives on how could adapt well into the new context.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Going back to the first category where they still haven't really sorted out the financial conditions, they are still on that journey to sort of accumulating savings, is there anything to be said about how people marry the sense of purpose with the sense of pragmatism in terms of solving for the financial need?

Neera Nundy (NN): I think it also really has to do with your own personal needs, I was reading this book Ray Dalio's principles, it's a really great book and he has this such a basic thing in it, which say something like having basic necessities like good relationships, a comfortable bed, good food and good sex all of that doesn't get any better or any worst with more money or less money for most of us and I think that really depends from an individual's perspective what are you comfortable with I mean at least for me personally what helped me make the transition at least from investment banking was I am not motivated with the big deals, so it is not exciting for me, so I am most thinking it's kind of strange how excited you are? Really are you making the difference? And so for me it was more, I will live in the money that I will have and I will be motivated by the work that I am doing so I have to live within those constraints and so when I meet young people and I am interviewing them and they are like but my budget is this and won't be able to live in this kind of building or that kind of building, I am like build a budget and figure out whether you can live in that or not and some people and some people can and some people can't, so it's not good or bad but I think it's being practical about what you need and I think there are quite a lot of people who will live within certain limitations to have the fabulous opportunity of making a difference and doing something different and impactful and it's not like we are poor in the sector, still paying to be able to live comfortably and I think the amazing thing about India is the amount that people live on is phenomenal, that no one can tell me you can't live comfortable life in the salary that Dasra is providing you now it may not be the life that you have decided to have, which is fine but it's not like, I mean look at

DJ: Sort of the needs and the wants right? It's definitely solves the needs the wants are infinite.

NN: And then once you get what you wanted then you are like wait a second am no entirely fulfilled any way so but it's a journey for everyone. So I think some people have an epiphany and some people have to go through that journey, I need more people to do it quicker.

DJ: But back to the second cluster, people that sort of are further along their life they have taken care of the savings and they are empty nesters to use your word what are some of the observations you have around how they transition and what are some of the mistakes they make in transitioning and what they think it is and what it is some time is different so what's been your observation about that transition?

NN: I think now I am realising the most difficult part of the transition is most of us at the stage in our organizations, at least in the social sector; we need people who roll up their sleeves. Functioning ambiguity, we don't have structures in systems similar to a corporate sector, we need shapers but we need shapers and doers and when you come at that stage and in your life you have been in a career where you are like an orchestrator, you are like you do this, you do this and you are kind of oversee, I mean the pace is different, the talent is different the resources are super constrained, so you are working in a very different environment, now some will thrive in it but a lot have to just change their mindset to what it's going to take for them to really leverage these skills? And I think that's the challenge is that they have grown in their corporate trajectory and then you come in to the social sector and the environment and the construct I think is the real challenge and some will thrive in it, I think it depends where you come from and the kinds of backgrounds but it's kind of like talks about this, you can have stars in certain environments when you are hiring those stars are actually not that great performers in your existing environment and so that's similar, I think you have to get back to the basics of like attitude, behaviours, values and all of that, I feel is much more important than like some of the hardest skills.

DJ: I am curious about in this particular transition is also sort of the mode of impact they chose, like you sort of eventually came to this three pillars for Dasra do you see sort of systematic mistakes people make or do you have observations around what sometimes they get wrong when they transition from for profit to the world of social impact?

NN: So you can transition to the world of social impact in two ways especially later in life with your wealth to be an actual philanthropist and to be giving and to actually be like an employee and a staff of a non-profit, its time or money and I think what happens later in life is whether it's your ego or your position you all of a sudden think like you know everything and maybe you did where you were but the game is different in this sector so often we struggle with humility we struggle with listening, we struggle with you know you have not done this before so I think they bring real great sense of lived experience but sometimes there is this strange power imbalance that often happens where they feel they are coming from privilege either with money or time and some-how all of us sitting in the social sector are like desperate for all of this but it takes us time and to figure out how to leverage these kinds of individuals whether its time or money and because we are even resource constraints one its with money you are often sometimes even compromising whether your strategy is, whether things you are going to do because you are trying to kind of get funding so its bit of a dance I think that takes place so being a bit more patient I think the pace, although the pace and the complexity of what we do is different than the corporate sector and that's where I find some of these challenges with these challenges with the later stage players.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: There were two big takeaways for me here.

One is the distinction between Needs and Wants in the context of making a transition decision. When people make these choices, the first thing I ask them is “do you have a clear set of criteria with which you will evaluate the options that will show up in front of you”. Most often that answer is a No. And the key to that set of criteria is building self-awareness around what matters to you, what gives you energy, what does success mean to you, what are the set of capabilities you have accumulated till date and so on.

The second is the point Neera makes about listening and adapting when experienced professionals come into this sector. I have seen a similar dynamic at play where senior leaders from the Armed Forces come into the corporate world, it takes a while for them to calibrate from a leadership style where a lot of the work can be delegated away to a situation that requires them to be more hands on. I have seen too many people try to offer suggestions and changes before understanding the nuanced context.

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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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