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## Context to the nugget

Ambi talks about what it takes to develop and maintain an account over a period of several years. He speaks about the criticality of having tentacles across the organization to get a pulse on the relationship. He also underscores the criticality of the role of the CEO in ensuring that he/she sets the right climate for the troops to share any potential cracks that are appearing in the relationship.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** If you take a ten year view, what are your insights around what it takes to build and keep that relationship over a decade, if you reflect on journeys that have lasted decades or beyond, what is it about the nature of the relationship that you built with those organizations or individuals?

**Ambi Parameswaran (AB):** Fortunately for us the FCB Ulka group was not very glitzy glamorous agency, we were not into winning big awards and stuff like that but one thing we were very good at was if we get an account, we will not lose the account, so whether it was Tata motors, or Zee or Wipro, ITC of course Amul for many many years, Abbott, ICICI bank these all are accounts which lasted, you know they are still there 10 20 30 years the idea is once you get a client make sure you do what is right for the brand make sure to do your homework, make sure to speak your mind then make sure and I have written chapter there called Smoke signals which to understand whether any smoke signals in your relationship if there are smoke signals you need to make sure you fix them so one way of handling deep client relationship is that the relationship has to be at multiple level, you cannot leave relationship only to one person. It has to be at a CEO level, at a marketing level, at a brand manager level, and there for you know if there any murmurs which are happening but the most important thing is if you are sincere, if you are doing good work, why will a client want to be apart with you? They will not!

**DJ:** The smoke signals also caught my attention, one is having relationship s across multiple levels, is there anything else that you have learnt in term of decoding the silence or decoding the diminishing trust or engagement as the case might be, what are the watch outs?

**AB:** There is no one watch out because each client's dynamic is different but I think the big thing is your biggest danger is if people change, at least in our agency a lot of us are constant and even one level below was constant, we don't change. But if there are changes in the client side it means there is danger, so very often you need to figure out who is coming, what is his background? Can you establish a relationship before he joins? One – you may have a relationship with him before, which is good, if it's not good can you find out? And figure out what relationship, if you can build the relationship even before he comes, if it is a stable team, the other important thing which the agency

and I think every company should encourage is tell the people that front end running the account or running the client give the bad news first, good news can wait. So if you had a bad meeting come and report it immediately, if you had a good meeting you went and presented something the client loved it I am happy to know that but you can tell me that on Monday, but if you had a bad meeting please come and share it immediately and please remember the fault is mine the credit is yours, so if there is any problem if there is a client is very upset with you I will go and meet the client. So, the other important thing which inculcated was if a client is upset the senior will pick up the phone and talk to the client, you will not hide, and you will not blame the youngster for losing an account. So, as a CEO will be responsible for five six accounts then at the next level, who's the guy responsible for the account? He has to have the guts to tell the client look I have heard you are upset with something we are presented can I come and meet you? And in a lot of cases what we find is the head of the business doesn't have the gumption to meet the client, whichever B to B business we are talking about coaching, consulting any advisory profession, you got to go to meet the client, there is nothing better than just meeting a client having a face to face meeting.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As I mention in my conversation with Ambi, in my previous organization Govind Iyer, the Managing Partner of EgonZehnder in India at that time would always make the distinction between an assignment, which is at best a P&L item and a relationship, which is a Balance Sheet item. Of course you need to deliver value over time to build and sustain the relationship. But making that distinction and ensuring that you make it safe for your team to report back any issues on the relationship front is critical as a leader, especially if you are in the Advisory Services business, whether it is Law, Management Consulting, Executive Search or Executive Coaching.

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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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Podcast Transcript [35.03 Ambi Parameswaran - Smoke Signals in a relationship](#)

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