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Context to the nugget

Ambi discusses how some of the leaders he has worked with combine science and art in making good judgments. He talks about how some of these leaders walk the fine line between following process and using well-informed gut to make superior decisions over time. This is specifically relevant in the world of Marketing and Advertising where the production values can vary by orders of magnitude.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): The other pieces I was curious about Ambi is notion of judgment? I guess I find advertising as an interesting canvas where you need to marry art and science, heart and head what have you learnt about leaders that have a very strong sense of judgement if you really look at some of the leaders that stand out in this particular domain what about them gives them that sound sense of judgement?

Ambi Parameswaran (AB): I think some of the smarter marketing companies have a process of approval right but the smarter leaders don't let the process come in the way of accepting a good idea. They know that there is process we need to go through the process but you people say that this will work I think this will work let's go ahead and let's use the process as only as a process right. So, they are not slave to the process whereas certain companies what I find end up becoming a slave to the process you know we like the idea about let's put it into test if test doesn't clear if we will not do it. You know if pre-test is 100% guaranteed this thing then why do you need us. You know you need a copy-writer, you read a research agency no of them I need it and it can go straight into search and then and one had to do plain speaking to some clients you know because a process became a hurdle but a lot of clients were smarter and able to balance the head and the heart. Yes, you need a process but you need to balance the heart you think it will work, it will work. So, in one of the examples I have talked about how this particular client I think Ravi Swaminathan of COMPAQ, the whole process from the brief to the final ad coming on TV was 10 days its unimaginable. You know any think less than 6 weeks is unimaginable. Normally it takes 3 months and some large FMCG companies should take 6 months 10 days turned out to be a good campaign probably the client was clear this was the brief and he was sharp focused on as long as the brief delivered, script delivered on the brief he said go and I was doing the Delhi talk with him and he said look in the IT space, in the technology space we don't have time you know we had a small innovation if we had got it and we need to put it out there within a month because someone else will copy it yaah that's the window I have so you guys give me the good idea and I said lets go and I had only the problem with the budget and my colleague said no we should spend the money because it's a good idea we should not compromise on the production values. So, we did it, the whole film happened in 10 days and turned out to be a damn good film. So, he was a good balance of head and heart.

DJ: But even that may be sticking to that right cost and value especially in ad world you also talk about superstars will come back to that in a minute. But you know the cost could be significantly so how have you thought about cost and value when it comes to big spends so the same ad campaign I am sure can be done at X, 10x, 0.1x I guess the cost curve could vary significantly so that something that something that you have built a strong judgement on over time?

AB: It has a two different cost one is cost of production; the production is very fuzzy. I will globally it is very fuzzy because the same ad film gives it to one producer her will quote 20 lakhs and other producer will quote 2 corers. Now are you getting 1.8 corers more form producer B compare to producer A that a judgmental call. Lot of clients get carried away by the star name of the director etc. but has to take a judgmental call say look this is ok but this is not ok right. Now that I think "The Naukri" story which I write about there and Sanjeev Bikhchandani told the detailed story in Delhi when we were doing the book launch and he said look the film you presented was casting as 20 Lakhs we had only 2 Crores to spend that 10% that a lot of money I said no its too much let's spend the money on media let's do the other option which is what different script at a lower cost but he said one of the colleague said no we should do this and that's when I talked about this whole concept of a failing versus failing to try the demonstration that it is built of try and fail then not to try at all. So, the media spends is pretty much at least you know those days were pretty scientific right how much what kind of exposure you will get? What will work? What is the threshold level? I think you keep titrating it. Now a days the digitals become a lot more complex you know clients are just throwing money at digital and hoping something sticks and everyone says I want a viral video you can't do a viral video you can do a digital video and hope and pray it becomes viral yaah totally beyond control but you know client will turn around and say I want a viral video. Hello you can't do a viral video.

DJ: Attempt people right that like I am going to give you a dropped catch, a missed call. You can only give me a catch whether I drop it or not is not in your control.

AB: Yaah exactly except them give you a missed call that you can cut off.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: To me, nugget captures the essence of the fact that leadership is a tight rope across so many dimensions. I am reminded of an insight from Devdutt Pattanaik (DP) when I asked him about how people should think about building good habits. He spoke about the distinction between building habits and cultivating awareness.

DP: *"This concepts of habits is a western idea, habit is a bad word in Indian philosophy, another word for habit is conditioned I am conditioned to do it, conditioning there's a pavlovian response, a god has a habit of salivating whenever the bell rings and the west has made it a virtue action without thought is habit repetitive action without thought is habit and if you look at the many of the cultures in the west they are like domesticated animals at a particular time they will get up and run, so they are on a treadmill all the time and this is seen as virtue, driving in a car with a coffee in your hand, nobody sees in America that this is tragedy, it's a tragedy, you can't enjoy your coffee, you can't enjoy your drive you have glamourized slavery"*

DJ: Do refer Nugget 25.07 if you want to listen into this piece. While this point was made in a different context, I think the crux of the insight is that being having habits are helpful but being aware, understanding the nuanced context and applying one's judgment is imperative. A bit like how

Ambi says, processes exist for a reason but if you become a slave to the process, then you often end up with sub-optimal outcomes.

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End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Devdutt Pattanaik that is referenced: [Building Habits vs. Enhancing Awareness](#).

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- 35.04 Ambi Parameswaran - Influencing without authority
- 35.05 Ambi Parameswaran - Building a trusted relationship
- 35.06 Ambi Parameswaran - Trusting the expert
- 35.07 Ambi Parameswaran - Judgment - Balancing head and heart
- 35.08 Ambi Parameswaran - The art of story telling
- 35.09 Ambi Parameswaran - Building a powerful personal Brand
- 35.10 Ambi Parameswaran - CEO connect with end consumer
- 35.11 Ambi Parameswaran - 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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