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Context to the nugget

Indranil distinguishes business story telling from Storytelling (that we see in Ramayana, Harry Potter or in movies). Indranil speaks about the fact that brevity and story-telling are not contradictory and it is often a false trade-off that people have in mind. He actually goes onto say that business story-telling might even be a more time-efficient way of getting complex, nuanced messages across the organization.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): So, Indranil – lets jump into the book. Congrats on the book and the initial success in the first few weeks. You use the term Business Story telling. For the purpose of listeners on this podcast, what is the nuance here? How business story telling is different from storytelling?

Indranil Chakraborty (IC): So let me take the two sides of the spectrum, if you were to draw an axis on one end of that spectrum is what I called Big S storytelling, Big S story telling is the usual story telling that we are aware of whether you take the Ramayana or the Mahabharata or the DDLJ or Harry Potter, I don't operate anywhere there for me business story telling is at the other extreme. This is little stories, little recount of experiences you have had all of which can be very powerfully brought in to make a point during business, business conversations etc. so to me that is Business storytelling; business story telling is harnessing it in the context of business. The critical differences to me are the amount of detail that you need to get into any story when you are in business needs to be only what is required to drive home that point and nothing more so there is a whole lot of work that you need to do to make sure that you don't keep back in the story stuff that you like which need not be important for delivering that message very clearly whereas if you are doing it in the bar, you can be rambling a bit adding things that are not there. The second big difference to me is storytelling in Business needs to be for a reason a business reason. There must be a reason why you telling a story, you are trying to make a point you are trying to illustrate something, you are trying to deliver something in a way that is more memorable, in a bar you could walk in and say let me tell you a story why? Because I heard a great story. Now you can't do that in business. And the last thing is because it is business and this is where I differ from the new generation of business storytellers that have arrived in the last five years is, I believe that the business story telling is doesn't have to do with anything like voice modulation. Very often the L&D person in the companies I work with, they look at my agenda at workshop and say, where is voice modulation? And my answer is in the theatre. For some reason in this country a lot of public speaking training and now story telling training is done by people from theatre, now while they are good at theatre we are not going to be doing theatre in the board room, we need to be in board room talking like you usually do in board rooms because otherwise it is going to stand out and one of the things that we have to understand is that no matter how convinced you are about the power of stories in business there is a huge wall

between business and storytelling and the reason it is there is the label we have for stories, stories are made up, stories are for entertainment, stories are largely for children exactly in the opposite of what we have in business, Business is fact business is about only sticking to the point how many of us have not had this situation where we have been trying to explain why something hasn't happened on the boss says *Kahani mat Batao* what does that mean Kahani is the bad word which is why when you bring stories into business your story has to be invisible what I mean by that is when someone is listening to your story he can't be saying he is telling the story because as soon as their brain figures out you are telling a story and then it figures out oh it's a board room he saying oh what an idiot? So that's to me some of the key differences between story-telling and business story telling.

DJ: Where do you see the line between brevity and storytelling? Brevity is something that is celebrated do you see a trade of there or it is a false trade off?

IC: Not at all in fact one of the key things I teach and, in the book, also talk about it is brevity in storytelling. So, what happens is when you have a story to tell and why are we doing storytelling in business? We are trying to harness three big powers of story. One is stories are easy to understand, stories are easy to remember and stories are easy to retell. Some of the things that you do not get in a business situation how many off sites have you been to? Where the CEO or some senior leader has explained the next year strategy and then when people have come back and their teams have said boss what was discussed in Goa he said strategy of next year what is the strategy? Or one power point will come, why is not repeatable? Because all those hours of so called business clear with lots of brevity has not landed. Now, when you use stories or story structures you get that power and you can do it in that same amount of time you would have otherwise taken because in many cases because of the layers of different English lines and sentences you are trying to explain very simple can be done with a story actually sometimes even shorter, so I don't see any fight between brevity, the desire for brevity and storytelling, in fact in the work of storytelling one of the critical things is brevity because brevity is best delivered when there is simplicity in communication and I love a Leonardo Vinci quote which said "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" and so when you are able to get very simple with your message you are not going to be long with it but that simple tight story will deliver much more than what a long paragraph of a lot of huge English word will have manage to do.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of one of the off sites I was at when I was at EgonZehnder. This must have been around 2012 or 2013 when Rajeev Vasudeva, the co-founder of EgonZehnder in India was appointed as the Global CEO of the firm. We were in Goa and Rajeev attended the offsite and decided to share his story of him starting EgonZehnder with Sanjiv Sachar in 1995. He spoke about his initial years of consulting and how they stumbled upon Executive Search. He spoke about how he got in touch with multiple firms and how a set of co-incidences led them to tie up with EgonZehnder. He spoke about his early days in the office where he would be the consultant and the peon in the office cleaning up when rain waters had flooded the office floors. He spoke about the early sacrifices he and his partner Sanjiv made how they went after their initial clients and picked the people he worked with. He must have spoken impromptu for about 45 minutes and we all listened in rapt attention, the only sound apart from Rajeev's voice you could hear at that time was the sound of the waves. Through his story, he touched upon things like Entrepreneurship, Excellence, Putting clients first, Collaboration and several other things that were core at EgonZehnder. But that was the first time, I had experienced a story from an authentic place that left a mark on me and drove home a lot of the points around Corporate culture, something a precise PowerPoint hadn't done till then.

If I may add another piece to what Indranil says. When we share from our lives, we are authentic in how we share, and we become vulnerable, then people start relating to us differently and the level of trust you build suddenly goes up a notch. So, while there is a business case in terms of transmission of values and strategy, I think there is a business case also in terms of superior inter-personal connects that get formed when people share authentically.

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End of nugget transcription

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- 37.02 Indranil Chakraborty - Demystifying Business storytelling
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- 37.05 Indranil Chakraborty - Story listening

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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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