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Context to the nugget

Tarun discusses how he has crafted his self-assigned space of thinking about issues around creativity and entrepreneurship in Developing countries. He talks about being known as the “clearing house” for something. He also talks about the tension between access to intellectual capital at Harvard and being located closer to the action that he is passionate about. He later goes on to discuss the allocating mechanism he uses to fill his time when he visits the various markets.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What are some of the things you do which on the 80-20 basis contribute towards you managing your time and attention?

Tarun Khanna (TK): So, the first thing I would say that, there is a simple guiding principle for me and the guiding principle is that, I would like to be known not out of any ego reason though everybody has an ego but not primarily I hope out of ego reasons I would like to be known as one of the key people whose thinking about issues related to creativity and entrepreneurship in the developing countries, that's my self-assigned space it's the place that I like to think about, I think I have something to say I think it's useful and productive for someone to be thinking about five billion of the world seven billion people on whom inadequate certainly scholarly and maybe policy attention is being lavished but the reason I keep saying that is that, if I can pull that off and to some extent I feel, I have pulled that off but to keep doing it better and better then I become the clearing house for the people coming and telling me things that they think are relevant to me and the measure of that is how often do I for unsolicited reasons get inbound offers of collaboration in other words going back to the combinatority. So today a strange person I had never met before from Indonesia wrote me a very nice long note, saying that he had seen something that I had done or talked about it or a video or a piece of writing and he thought about it and emailed me a long essay and I read this essay and said well this is really very insightful, not that I have any particular desire or bandwidth to collaborate with that individual but he is contributing to the grist of my mill of continuing to understand something about developing countries so if it was the clearing house of something then the world comes to you, makes a lot easier than you chasing around the world what people thinks, so that's the first overarching principle that just become the clearing house for something and this goes back to the specialization point, in terms of the tactical I don't know that I am even above the median of being wise about this, I am trying to think about it in real time what is it that I could say that doesn't sound utterly silly about rationing my time, I hope this doesn't sound egotistical but I think once again the clearing house, if you do have something to say that's valuable then I think you will find that people will be willing to adapt you to some extent, so in my case the way it works is because I am physically resident in Boston in Cambridge, Massachusetts. most of the time and my work is in discreet locations, about half of way it is in India and China and the other half is scattered

around the other developing countries in the world that it's not possible for me to be physically immersed in the phenomena on that I want to study 24*7 which is professionally what I would like to be doing. I can't do that because then I don't have access to the intellectual infrastructure that enables me to make sense of those things so that's the dilemma. So what I am able to do to some extent is to for e.g. it's an typical is to show up in a place let people know that I am going to this place from time A to time B and simply in effect allocate the time to different projects, different causes, different events that I might want to participate in, always with a the view to saying am I adding something? Am I bringing something unique to the table? Am I meeting new interesting people? Am I giving the opportunity for others to come and engage with me and of course as an educator, am I educating people who otherwise I may not have a chance to reach when I am sitting in Cambridge mass, so that becomes the allocating mechanism, I don't know that have anything wise to say about devises and emails and phones and so on these ... seems 24*7 so it's hard to know how to quite set there are, when you figure it out let me know and I will adopt it.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of the Japanese term Ikigai, which suggests that we need to find something which is at the intersection of what the world needs, what energizes us, where we have skills to add value and where we could be paid for what we do. Tarun talking about the need around thinking in a policy that affects 5 billion people on the planet is something to that effect. He talks about how he gets energized about it, how it's a real need to be solved and how sitting in Boston at Harvard Business School at the intersection of ideas he is able to add value, commercial value in this context.

The other interesting thing in this nugget was the way Tarun spoke about an allocating mechanism for his time. One thing I have noticed with people that manage their time and attention well is that it's less around the discipline around how they manage time in a literal way but it's more about having the clarity around the criteria you would use to deal with things that come your way. Having a clear framework to say what you will say yes to and what you will say no to. They may not articulate it clearly when you ask them, but when you spend time with them you realize that these people have a very clear filtration mechanism for figuring out where they spend their time and attention.

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End of nugget transcription

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Tarun Khanna - Nuggets

- 38.00 Tarun Khanna - The Full Conversation
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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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