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Context to the nugget

Rajat speaks about the kind of leadership style that is required at the helm of a firm like McKinsey. He speaks about how one has to think about influencing and nudging rather than commanding and directing while leading a team of highly capable and self-driven people.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): You spoke about your leadership style and in the book you also talk about the Swami Vivekananda style and the Napoleon style in terms of being democratic and being decisive and I specifically ask this in the context of a firm like McKinsey where you have several intelligent, thoughtful, opinionated partners on the top how have you thought about that spectrum and in what sorts of situations have you worked at different points at that spectrum?

Rajat Gupta (RG): Well, as you know I think if I may say so McKinsey has an extraordinary talent as if you just assail in terms of pure business there is no other institution in the world which has more CEOs amongst their alumni and there is none, not even close so that means that there is firstly they have enormous raw talent they also learnt a lot during their time in McKinsey and they developed a good and perhaps unique to each one of them separate leadership style that worked for them and for the but in McKinsey itself leading McKinsey because of the characteristics of their very highly talented people with their own points of view and we really work as a partnership what that means is that the job of the managing partner is really a sort of first marks equals rather than here's I am the leader I'll show you the way and you follow me, you have to, your main responsibility is to understand the aspirations of your partners and then nudge it in a particular way, influence it but not try to dictate it of course you have tremendous influence because in a firm like McKinsey as a managing director you may go all their appointments so you can be selective for who you choose for leadership positions and as a result influence the direction but at the same time you don't have unchecked powers, not you have complete freedom it's all democratic, all major decisions have made in a democratic fashion, so in that sense it's a very high contact sport. Leadership in McKinsey is like you have to be there, you have to have intense dialogues with your fellow partners you have to understand them, you have to often visit them in their own home turf, as a McKinsey director you don't come and say OK I want to see you come and visit me in my ivory tower it doesn't work like that and shouldn't work like that, it's a particular style of leadership I am not sure that that is relevant for all companies but more and more if you have a talented team that works well when you want the team to have to rise to the occasion and perform to their best then you must behave like a collaborative partnership.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: As Rajat says, while the style of leadership that Rajat talks about including intense dialogues with team members, understanding people's aspirations and giving them the space to flourish might not be relevant in all situations, but given the pace of change in the world we are in and the disruption we are seeing across categories, the Swami Vivekananda style is arguably more relevant today than it was in the 80s and 90s, where the leader could know most of the answers and get away with a Napoleonesque approach. And that transition of styles I notice is non-trivial, especially with people who have grown up in the Napoleonesque paradigm to use Rajat's words. They find it really hard to be relevant in a paradigm where you need to behave like Swami Vivekananda, listen, absorb, adapt, empower and get the most out of your team.

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End of nugget transcription

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Rajat Gupta- Nuggets

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- 43.03 Rajat Gupta - Vivekananda versus Napoleon
- 43.04 Rajat Gupta - Leadership at McKinsey across 3 terms

- 43.05 Rajat Gupta - Settling into Scandinavia
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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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