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## Context to the nugget

RG speaks about how leaders coming in from one context can effectively adapt to a completely new context especially when they do not have a working knowledge of the new space. He underscores the importance of humility, open-ness to learning to build trust and come up the learning curve in the new environment.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I was curious when we briefly spoke about getting a leader from a different industry based on intrinsic potential and characteristics. I want to sort of dig there a little bit more because there the organization often is not privy to some of the hidden qualities that the hiring panel is betting on right and the leader sometimes get measured on traditional characteristics like how much does he know my industry, how much does he know my customers and so on and so forth. In those situations when leaders transition from context A to context B to a very different industry or space, what have you seen in getting those principles in getting those transitions right?

R Gopalakrishnan (RG): As I said earlier you have to go in with a capital H. Like for example, when I joined Tata's, there was not a single industry which I was familiar with, power generation, making trucks and motor cars, creating telephony networks, I mean these were the boards that I served on, I was not familiar with these, I was a little more comfortable with things like making chemicals and pesticides, because they had a similarity to a consumer goods business like Hindustan Lever. And I remember I used to go and spend my Saturdays or whichever is a holiday there like a student and I still have my diaries of the notes I took. I would go down and sit with front facing people trying to learn and always walking away saying I will never, never in this lifetime know as much as these guys because they have spent the last 20 years doing this. And of course, one of the things that every leader should do is to go and talks to people less powerful than him, it helps you to be humble. It helped me a great deal to be humble when I went to Trombay Power Station or to Pune factory of Tata Motors to find so many people who were much junior to me in the hierarchy, or who knew infinitely more than I about that particular subject. And if you can go in with that attitude the guy also recognizes that of course I don't seem to know everything, he shares more willingly, just like you would share your knowledge with somebody who is interested. And I think in a leadership transition where you do not have that domain knowledge this is the most important lesson that I learnt. It promotes capital H, which you have to adopt after shedding capital E for ego from your last job. So, it is like you play Ravana in this scene, in the next scene you have to play Rama. So, you don't change your mindset, you are not going to be able to pull off both, you know.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is worth understanding the key reason the organization has brought you on board. Ravi Venkatesan (RV) speaks about his transition to heading Microsoft in India after several years in Cummins.

RV: *“you have got to figure out what really matters, so in Microsoft, that was a clear why the company had hired me because we were becoming irrelevant in country if billion people, and so they wanted not a technology guy or at least Bill and Steve wanted somebody who understood India, so within six months I said in order to become relevant this is what it takes and here is a set of things we ought to be doing, and it was plausible I don’t think it was rocket science or brilliant and they said great now go do it, where is your team? And by the way here is the billion dollars of investment go make it happen and the team in India said Wow, holy cow, this guy has done a really amazing job, getting us all this investment, they used to beg for every head count and suddenly we had an abundance of riches”*

DJ: Having the clarity around the axis of value adds can be immensely clarifying when you are being brought into a new space. It gives you focus in terms of what you need to do to move the needle in terms of outcomes and winning trust in the system.

Thank you for listening. If you find this of value, do take a moment to visit the podcast archives at [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com). You might specifically be interested in my conversation with Michael Watkins on how leaders can settle in effectively in a new organization. You might also like the theme “settling into a new context” where we learn from leaders across different walks of life on how they navigated the first few months in a new environment including someone like Gandhiji when he moved back to India from South Africa.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Ravi Venkatesan that is referenced: [Listening intently during Transitions](#).

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**Settling into a new context:** Figuring out “where to go” is only a part of the challenge for leaders in transition. How you land effectively in a new context is as critical. Hair line cracks often become full blown fractures if not attended to carefully. Leaders talk about some key lessons Individuals could bear in mind as they transition across contexts (Army to Business world, US to India, MNC to Family Business, and Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

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## R Gopalakrishnan - Nuggets

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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 [59.09 R Gopalakrishnan - Getting cross-industry transitions right](#)

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