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Context to the nugget

Atul speaks about the notion of staying authentic and the audience slowly finding you rather than trying to pander to the tastes of any one particular segment. He indicates that he doesn't start by saying what does the audience want and tailoring his message to the cohort. He says that you need to stay true to who you are and let your audience slowly warm up to you over a period of time.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Atul, picking up from one of the things you said finding your voice, you know, you spoke about some of the comedians telling you that you have a unique voice and this phrase comes up in the stand-up world, but I am curious about the term in general. What does that term mean in the stand-up world and talk to us a little bit about finding your own voice in this space?

Atul Khatri (AK): So, you know, obviously the stand-up first of all means that you are standing up for an opinion, for your views, standing up maybe for a cause, I think that stand-up comes more from that, number one and what has happened I think in the last few years all over the world comedians are making better sense than most of the politicians because honestly as... because we have a voice, we have a platform and because any country like today in India politics is a very, very big thing. Today, I think in terms of a topic and especially since 2014 but it has really become it has become the talk of the town. I mean, you can't get on stage without making some political reference at least. And audiences like that because also as an audience we are very, very politically aware, we have opinions, we have this and thanks to WhatsApp and things now everybody is getting so much political news. Earlier politics was only restricted to people who read newspapers, but today now our children who don't read newspaper they are getting on their WhatsApp, they are getting on their social media, they are looking at memes and things like that. So, I think it's very, very important for comedians to have a voice, to raise a voice and to talk about topics, their opinion, it's their opinion, obviously it's not the final word, it's their opinion like in your opinion, but their opinion on what they feel and I think that is very, very important, because you will see comedians around the world especially in the U.S., in the UK and even in India, I always say that and now I am getting slightly political here, but in the absence of a clear majority it becomes the responsibility of everybody, the media, poets, authors, comedians and even people as a society should question everything, you should not just take it as it comes, at least question it because otherwise somebody will have a free run and you don't want somebody to have a free run honestly and take your country for a ride because we all know what politicians do, it's not that everybody's good or everybody's bad. So, I think, it becomes very, very important for comedians also to have an opinion on whatever subject they are comfortable talking about. It's not that you have to talk about politics, you have to talk about Bollywood. Like, I don't do some of the jokes because I don't relate to it, for example... I

may not like those jokes, it's my individual thing but yeah, I think it's important for comedians to have a voice for sure.

DJ: And I guess I am also linking it back to the point you made earlier where you said the average age of the industry in terms of performers is probably, you know, people are probably 15-20 years younger to you. So, did that mean that you had to be a little more thoughtful about who your target segment is or is that something that evolved naturally depending on the material you had?

AK: No, that actually, it evolved actually. So, honestly whenever you write jokes and that I think for many comedians like if you... you have to write what you find funny, what you find comfortable, what you have an opinion on, you just can't write because the audiences are liking it. For example, last two years the biggest rise in comedy in terms of volume, in terms of money has been Hindi stand-up comedy, the same kind of genre of like satire comedy, but done in Hindi because of Jio and I know there were sort of comedians initially who used to do in English, but now have switched purposely to Hindi because they feel they can ride on that. But it doesn't come naturally to it because if you are not from... if you are at home, you are speaking English, your parents speak English to you, you speak to your children in English and suddenly you switch to a different craft (00:04:17) and start doing Hindi and you don't know half the words, you don't know half their meanings and you start doing Hindi comedy just because it is a trend, that's ridiculous. So, you have to find your voice in terms of what suits you, what suits your personality, what suits your age, not really age, it's not that I am not saying that a 19-year-old guy cannot or a 24-year-old guy can't talk about politics, no nothing like that. Today's kids are so smart and we have a lot of these young comedians who have great political opinions and jokes. So, I think, finally it's a question of finding your voice, finding what your comfort level is and also I think I always tell a lot of the younger comedians, don't go for what the audience likes, go for what you like, what your voice is and that's audience will automatically, you will find your audience, you will find your niche audience or people who like you. And as far as me, I don't really say, okay, this I should write because I should get a younger audience, but for some reason I have a lot of young audience. I think 70% of my audience is below the age of 24 or 25. The reason is I don't know; I think they look ki this is how my dad should be. Because I used to get this, you are so cool, we want our dad to be like you. So that's where that came in because the kind of topics which I talk about are fairly I would say cool as what these young kids call it. And what happens is me what happens when I am dealing with a joke, the kids are listening to it from a parents' perspective and when I... sorry from their perspective when I deliver a joke the parents are sort of interpreting it from their perspective. So sometimes it works both ways.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This notion of finding your voice is quite a profound point that Atul makes that shows up in different ways in the context of what we do in our life and the products and services we offer to the people around us.

Here is another take on the same topic from Amish Tripathi (AT) who transitioned from the world of Financial Services after a degree in IIM Calcutta to becoming a writer. When I asked him about how he thought about tailoring his writing to his audiences, this is what he said.

AT: *"It was just for me, look I was a banker man, no one wants to listen the banker let's be honest and a banker going with the philosophical thesis 'what is Evil?' they will say, yes, you bankers are Evil. So, I was just writing it for my family and myself that's it. And it was a day addition to my job as a banker. And then of course that thesis got converted into an action adventure book the idea being through hopefully engaging story I will communicating at the wrote of it is the philosophy of a 'what*

is Evil' and I am trying to communicate that through this adventure through this story and yes that's how it panned out.

DJ: From writing to yourself to writing a book that gets published what was that journey like?

AT: When I write I don't even care, even now when I write am not really thinking about how it will be received by the readers, critics, publishers or anyone else frankly. This is how I wrote my first book and this is how I write today as well, I can't say it was a conscious choice when I was writing my first book because I wasn't thinking that it would get published. I guess without realizing it I was following what lord Krishna tells us in Bhagwat Geetha "karmanaye vadhika raste, Maa Phaleshu kadachana" - that you have a right to your Karma, not to the fruits of your Karma and we in the modern world have interpreted this wonderful philosophy to mean something fatalistic which is wrong, what lord Krishna was telling us, what he was telling is actually if you detached from the results of your Karma, if you are detached from success or failure then actually you are unstoppable, if you are doing something simply because you love doing it, simply because you enjoy your Karma so much who can stop you? Failure can of course be demotivating because it feels sadness, grief, demotivation in your heart and it stops you but success can be as dangerous, you will find so many people that are one eight wonders because success filled pride in their head and they lose their way but if you are detached from success or failure then actually you are unstoppable because you will just keep doing what you love doing and I am not saying that I am a great philosopher and I consciously figured this out it's just that I loved doing anything with my books so much that I genuinely didn't care whether it succeeded or not, I wasn't really thinking whether it get published or not I just love doing anything associated with my books."

DJ: The other perspective about being authentic is from Sudhir Sitapati (SS) – the author of The CEO Factory. He talks about how Brands have to stay authentic to what they stand for.

SS: "one of the things that great brands have is that people who love the brand and people who hate the brand must say the same thing about it. That is the mark of a true outstanding brand. So, you may not like the things that... people who like and people who hate it may not like the same thing but they say the same thing. So, a brand as I have written in the book is..."

DJ: Give me an example just for me to get a sense of what you are saying.

SS: So, let's take a strong brand that I worked on, let's say Lifebuoy. People who love it will say it's got the strong smell which is really disinfectant and I love it, it makes me feel really clean and hygienic and guys who hate it will say it's the strong smell and it is disinfectant and I really feel like I'm in a hospital. They will align on the attribute. So, they will say the same things about it, but they may like it or they may not like it, right. So, that's the characteristic of really, really powerful. It's a good way to judge brands and I suspect that's the same about personal brands as well. You cannot be different things to different people. That's the principle of branding, you have to be the same thing to everybody whether they like you or not and therefore you got to choose those few attributes or those few associations you want to own, close your eyes whether it's a personal brand or a real brand you'll be able to identify people in three four words then their strong brands. They have to be authentic. They have to be true also to their... you know, one of the things I do a lot when I do brand work DJ is we do something called brand archaeology, which is go into the deep history and many of our brands are very old, the deep history of the brand, the founder and what was the vision with which it was founded, what was the birthing qualities of the brand because they tend to be the true qualities of the brand that 70 or 80 or 100 years later and you got to kind of rediscover it. And I think that's the truth about personal brands. I'm not an expert as I tell you but as I am talking about it, I guess you've just got to go within... you can't game it and say what will that person like and what will

this person like and how can I be... you've got to understand what it is that you are and whatever it is that you are if you are true to it, people ends up liking you and that's true about brands, the sharper they are you will always have people respecting you"

DJ: I like the point Sudhir makes about studying the brand archaeology and staying true to it. In the work I do, I find it helpful to understand an individual through their journey and understand their archaeology. Just like Sudhir talks about the birthing qualities of the brand, I find that staying true to our past and our history can provide us helpful perspective in the way we make choices. Bob Keegan, who has done a lot of work in adult development, talks about the transition from a socialized mind to a self-authoring mind. When we do that, it is helpful for us to understand our core and stay true to it.

If this topic is of interest, tune into my conversation with Jennifer Garvey Berger, an earlier guest where we talk about some of these transition points. If you like this topic, you might also like the Playlist Authenticity, in the Curated Playlists section at the Podcast.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Amish Tripathi that is referenced: [Where the seeds of transition were sown](#) and [writing for self](#).

Nugget from Sudhir Sitapati that is referenced: [Building a personal brand](#).

RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

Authenticity: As we move into a Digital world where leaders are a lot more “out there”, there is a greater premium on authenticity today than possibly a few years ago. Leaders across fields talk about what the word means to them and how it influences their behaviours and choices. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Atul Khatri - 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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