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Context to the nugget

Atul speaks about how he had to be pragmatic about the cash flows given the lop-sided odds of success in this industry. He also speaks about the support that his wife offered to ensure that there is some buffer in the system. He speaks about the timing around moving from his career as a businessman to doing comedy full time.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And the other piece I am curious about is like in the entertainment industry, I guess at some level stand up is part of the entertainment industry. It can be a low odds profession right, out of every 100 people who start maybe five or two or 10, a handful of people are able to make it a commercially sustainable career. So, given that, what's the kind of advice you give to people that approach you saying should I consider a career in stand-up? What are some of the things and what are some of the mistakes you see people making in jumping onto this career?

Atul Khatri (AK): See, first of all I think obviously it is very, very difficult but I think even Bollywood is very, very difficult in India. I think there the success it is even more I think badly compared to stand-up comedy. But I think the biggest advice I will give people first of all don't leave your job. I tell them, don't leave your job, continue to do your time management, because I have had people who have asked me sir, I did this open mic, I did very well, the audience laughed, I didn't get sleep for four days, I am leaving my job. I said, okay and what if you don't do well then, I mean, you have a rich father then it's okay, then go ahead, leave your job, tell your dad to pay your bills, otherwise you have to pay your bills at the end of it. So, advice I give, three or four advice I give everybody first of all, it's a hard, it's a difficult job, come to it just for the long haul, don't come to it for, don't waste your time, don't... I know comedians who after doing comedy for like 8 9 years have now started seeing some success, that's the amount of time it took them for whatever reason. So, first of all it is hard work; number two, don't leave your job, try to do it like how I did it, at one time when you see that you are making as much money or more money in comedy and you have a support system back. I will be very honest with you when I got into comedy; I had this long discussion with my wife. Hey, should I... I feel that there is a thing that I should get into full-time, I can see the market potential, and I can see that I am doing well, I am getting shows, if I spend more time I will get more shows, I can write more, I can perform more and she is also a hair stylist, she has a salon in Bombay so she said, yeah go for it, and I am there. So, in case some days, some months you don't make money, I will make money. Initially to be honest my wife is also a professional sourdough baker since last 3-4 years, home baker and honestly in this pandemic first 15-20 days, she was selling bread, her bread sales increased through the roof and I have had no shows. So, she was actually the bread winner of the house. So, yeah, we are each supporting each other and I think that support system is very, very important before you take this leap of faith and say chalo haan; it's a creative thing I will find my

thing. Yeah, unless you are willing to share a room with four guys in a room and not eat three times because this honestly like now in this pandemic I know many, many comedians and forget comedians across Bollywood lot of artists, technicians and all who have probably have difficulty finding two meals a day maybe because of suddenly the income just plugged, the tap just stopped, it just went away.

DJ: And then back to 2016, Atul, the moment where you decided... you said it was a one-year process, so maybe it was some time in 2015. What was the trigger for you to say okay, I am shutting down the hardware business and moving to comedy full-time? Was it that commercially it became as lucrative or more lucrative or was there any other trigger at which you took a final call?

AK: No, I think it was I was enjoying it much better. My wife felt I was a much happier person. I suddenly became a more positive person, I would say. I was really enjoying this process because this phase was new for me, it was like, I am starting a new life to be honest with you, rather than dealing with vendors and principals, now I am dealing with comedy clubs, I am dealing with comedians, this is a cool job, it is a cool job, sitting with 4-5 comedians writing jokes for maybe a film award show or maybe writing new jokes for a new show you are writing. It's a very, very, creatively a very, very satisfying job. And obviously I was enjoying it because it was my, I don't know whether you could it my passion but was a hobby turned passion, which I studied enjoying it. So, I think, that really kept me going in 2016 and I think economic was also a reason, I was doing well in it and I could... here I want to talk about something else, I don't know if this is the right time to get it but actually I am a Sindhi, and this is what I have learnt, I have been reading books on our Sindhi culture and I am a very, very proud Sindhi and one of the things about Sindhis is we don't sort of... we look at opportunities, new opportunities and jump into it as soon as you got to get sort of the to get the advantage or to, sort of, once we smell an opportunity we like to get into it. So just to give you an example like the Sindhis in Hong Kong. They went there in the 1920s, 1930s before the partition to do trade; they should do trade in cloth, and then they opened those tailoring suits in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was known for these tailoring suits, you go there they will give you three suits in 24 hours, they were all owned by Sindhis; even today most of the shops owned by Sindhis. Then when the television sort of boom started coming in the world, they were the first ones to get into television trade, all those Jumbo Electronics and Esquire and all those guys and then the VCR business. Like I have friends, my Sindhi friends in Hong Kong who were cloth merchants, they moved to TV, they moved to VCR, they moved to CD, LD, DVD, computers, laptops, mobile phones, CCTV cameras, and now many of them are selling hardware for Bitcoin churning, you know, you require apparently some crazy hardware to churn out these Bitcoin coins or something. So many of them... these guys have started selling those now. So, it's not that no, no, no, we are traditionally a cloth company, we will stick to it for 100 years, we may die in it, we may sink with it, but we will do it. So, we jump, we look at and that is traditionally because we have always been traders, you now, Sindhis because I think Sindhis they get into any country or anything they learn first the local language because to do business you need to know the local language. So Sindhis around the world I met thanks to comedy, they will talk fluent Mandarin or Cantonese or Swahili or Spanish as if it's their first language because to get into the trade you have to know the language. So, I think that was really... I don't even think, oh, what will people say, a CEO of a 25-year-old company IT company doing very well and doing comedy now, I used to... I remember friends would tell me *accha tu kitne saal tak karega*, how many years will you do comedy for? I said dude this is lifelong. What are you saying, you will do only comedy? I said, yeah. Arre, you were running such a big company, I said, yeah but I want to do this and I see the opportunity over here and I think it's a new life for me, I think live it and I really don't, even in this pandemic, I don't regret that decision. May be in this pandemic, I would have more... if I was running a company with 80 people, I would have more problems than now, right now I am just alone, just responsible for myself, not responsible for 80

people's salaries, not even 80, now when you.. I used to always tell people it's not 80 employees, you look after may be 320 or 400 people because there is a family behind it also which you have to support and their ecosystem.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I do think we need to study the odds of success in a certain field and take the plunge only when we have solved the basic questions around money and sustainability. When I asked Amish Tripathi (AT), when he moved the Banking industry to Writing full time, here is what he said.

AT: "It was a pragmatic decision, look I come from middle class family so I always joke "Bhai mere pass baap dada ka ashirvad hai jaaydat kuch nahi" so I have to be pragmatic and practical in my career decisions, I have responsibilities you know I am blessed with the child, I have a wife so I resigned only after second book when my royalty cheque became greater than my salary cheque"

DJ: Especially in a creative pursuit, if you have other concerns playing in your head, I feel it will fundamentally come in the way of you unlocking your creative potential and might set you off on a negative spiral. It is good to have solved for the commercial issues or at-least have a stop loss point in your head before you take the plunge.

The other time this urge to follow your passion often comes up much earlier and often we are at the mercy of parents at this phase of life.

Celebrated photographer and Producer Atul Kasbekar (AK) speaks about how he was pursuing a Chemicals degree in UDCT, a reputed college in Mumbai but really wanted to pursue photography. He speaks about his father's approach to the situation.

AK: "In the first year I realize "yaar ye main nahi kar sakta" this I really should not do, so I spoke to couple of people one of them was Pralhad Kakkar and he said a very interesting thing "95% of humanity goes to work every day and 5%, I am sure he made that number up in his head but it seems very accurate and he said 5% of makes their living at what they enjoy. So Pralhad said just ask yourself what is it that nobody need to tell you to do and if you are doing that to make a living then you never really working there is no concept of, you are never getting up on a Monday morning and going to work, weekend comes and is a big deal, rest of my week was also fun, so if you are going to work, I figure you can work for 6, 8, 10 hours a day beyond that the motivation has to be passion otherwise it will be a work very soon, so I said OK no body needs to tell me to take pictures, it was a very serious hobby and I took some rubbish photos of dogs and cats and horses and sunset and my sister and whatever but I enjoyed that, so when I started talking to my parents then we met a couple of people I met Gautam which is a very interesting story used to, how I met Gautam Rajadhyaksh but when I spoke to my parents they were freaking out because and you can't blame then because from the background my dad was eldest of five brothers and he as a master in Mathematics the second one is the Architect and thirds Doctor, the fourths Chemical Engineer and the fifth one is a Chartered Accountant, what would be called as respected profession in the context of then, so they were like you want to be a photographer great but what you are going to do for a living? That kind of thing but what was interesting was that I wasn't someone who has flipped I captained in my school for cricket, in debates, I represented Maharashtra state at the republic day parade in the NCC I was school captain, I captained Basketball so it wasn't like this guy is going to chuck it all the way, so as they see it be fairly seriously about whatever so I have to say it was a very big decision for them and hats off, they tried all this things of, "but why don't you finish the degree and then you do whatever you want to and I was like why would I waste three years? Makes no sense, even though he couldn't afford it at

that time my dad insisted that “whatever education you want is not a problem, you figure out which is the best place in the world to go to and I will send you there and I was like but you can’t afford it right now,” and he was saying “shut up that none of your business” but this is your long rope because the education is everything the receipt I want for it, he always had this thing about degree, so I said photography I don’t really need a degree I can assist people and like I will learn, he said “no, I want a degree to make myself happy that the degree is my receipt for the money I am spending so you give me my receipt, I don’t care what you do with this. So, it was a great line he said “this is your long rope now you come up with it or you hang yourself is up to you but I am giving you that long rope and after I have taken care of your education and your sisters education etc. your mother and I will studiously spend your inheritance” which I thought was a very cool thing and that’s one of the few lines I have brutally use with my kids “kya padhna hai bataao, you get there one shot at the title after that good luck buddy and if you need me to make phone calls I am more than happy to make them, do you need me to stand guarantor of something I am happy to do that but it’s you go on your journey now, then that safety net right now that right under your arks for my kids I will move that now thirty feet below and then further below and then take it away.”

DJ: I guess passion versus pragmatism calls is not easy. Very often, we end up swinging to the extremes— one extreme is climbing a mountain where there is no money and the other extreme is that we make a lot of money but we end up selling our souls! I guess the key is how we find a middle path so that we don’t swing to the extremes when we are confronted with this fork in the road.

If this is of interest, you might like the Playlist “Pursuing your passion” in the Curated Playlists section of the podcast at playtopotential.com.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Amish Tripathi that is referenced: [Transitioning from Financial Services to Writing](#).

Nugget from Atul Kasbekar that is referenced: [Transitioning from Engineering to Photography](#).

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Pursuing your passion: “Follow your heart” is an advice that is commonly doled out to individuals that are trying to make career choices. However, the reality is little more nuanced. People who have followed their heart talk about how they have weaved it into their lives or in some cases, how they have been pragmatic about taking the plunge. You can access the playlist [here](#).

Identity: Identity refers to the reputation, characteristics etc. of a person that makes the individual or the people around him/her think about them in a certain way. To put simply, how do we think of ourselves and what to the others think of us. Identity is a key element that we need to wrestle with during pivotal transitions. Herminia Ibarra shares her insights on how we should treat Identity as a Work in Progress that gets influenced by the journey we go through and the choices we make. Ram Guha speaks about the multiple identities of Gandhiji. Atul Kasbekar speaks about how he saw his identity evolve from being a photographer to a producer. All this and more in this playlist. 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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Podcast Transcript [61.06 Atul Khatri - Passion versus Pragmatism](#)

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