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## Context to the nugget

Vinay speaks about how the two phases of transition played out when the power shifted between Vajpayee and Advani. He speaks about the how the transitions were not sudden and how the two leaders handled themselves in the situation.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Let's talk about the two transitions Vinay; you talk about the one in 1986 where Advani got the upper hand and subsequently in 1995 when Vajpayee started leading the party. If we just focused on let's say the first three, six, nine months post that transition, I am curious about how the two handled themselves, you know, every relationship needs a period of readjustment. So, talk to us about what that looked like in those two passages of play.

Vinay Sitapati (VS): Yeah, that's a good question Deepak, but I think we got to look six months after and six months prior, or even prior because it eases the blow. So, what are the mechanisms to ease that blow? Now if you look at 1985, I am sorry, I have to go a little bit into the historical reads for this, the why was the... why did the RSS force Vajpayee to step down because Vajpayee's analysis of what it took to defeat the Congress was that he felt that the BJP should join the non-Congress opposition by being secular and socialist, that was his idea. His sense was that if you wanted to... and the Congress was the 180-pound gorilla in the room from Indian independence up to the 1980s. So, he felt to defeat them you have to align with the socialists, you have to align with the regional parties, and therefore he felt that the BJP should have less to do with the RSS. He felt the BJP should portray a moderate image, that's why it's called the Bharatiya Janta Party. It uses the phrase Janta Party, which was the 1977 to 1980 party in India in government in India headed by Morarji Desai but under the tutelage of Jayaprakash Narayan, which was seen as a secular socialist grassroots alternative to the centralising tendency of Indira Gandhi. And in 1984 in the elections held the BJP gets destroyed. It gets reduced to two seats. The lowest Hindu nationalism has got in its history. Now, my sense is that at least a part of it was Indira Gandhi's death a few months ago, which give a sympathy wave to her son Rajiv Gandhi, but the RSS interpreted it and I think there's some truth to that also that it was a rejection of Vajpayee's attempt at secularism that the radical Hindu vote had gone to Rajiv Gandhi, in memory of Indira Gandhi who has stood against the breaking up of India's sacred geography. Now, so the puzzle in some sense is after late 1984 why does it take a year-and-a-half to kick out Vajpayee. That itself tells you something about the organisation. There's no sudden humiliating kicking out; Vajpayee knew his time was up, he had a year to try to find a successor and Advani's genius was he was personally loyal to Vajpayee while being ideologically loyal to the RSS, so he was basically the right winger or the hardliner that Vajpayee could deal with. So, I think the first lesson of transition that you see then is don't make it sudden and humiliating. So, there are one-and-a-half years between the sacking order and the actual leaving and also consult the incumbent in who

you want to replace her or him with and I think you see that there. In 1995, once again, Advani begins to realise after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the fact that the BJP actually begins to lose states after the demolition that maybe Hindus, the majority community in India are tired of radicalism and he begins to sense that. So, he begins to slowly make moves immediately after that, Vajpayee becomes the leader of opposition replacing Advani, so that's the first step He's now the parliamentary voice of the BJP, in I think around 1993 and it takes him another two years to basically announce Vajpayee not him, by which time it is reasonably obvious even to the RSS that the BJP is not going to get a single largest majority and needs allies and Vajpayee is a much more conducive figure to get allies compared to Advani. So, I think that's the first lesson Deepak from these transitions, which is that don't make it sudden because it's humiliating, it's insulting, you know, this Donald Trump, you are fired. In the Indian context people don't like it but do it nonetheless, but take your time, consult the... tell the incumbent that look your time is up, but consult him or her in who should be the replacement. So, you get a mix of someone that person likes and someone you like. I think these are the two things that I would say stand out and that help ensure that the relationship continue. To give you another example, which is you asked what happened after. Between 1986 and 1995 or I would say 1993, Vajpayee was completely distant from the party, nobody wanted to associate with him. He would sit in his house. I have these very colourful descriptions, he used to love eating prawn which for like a Hindu BJP party was considered an issue. He didn't care. He enjoyed his alcohol; he had his friends who would be drinking with him and Advani wasn't invited. He wouldn't come, Advani was a teetotaler, and he was also a vegetarian. So, he was socially very removed from Vajpayee but nonetheless they would meet for lunch once a week, they would exchange notes. So, when the professional relationship was torn, they had some kind of personal friendship and as we see later when the personal relationship frayed when they were Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, they continued having some kind of professional relationship. So, I think these are some of the insights on these two transitions that I see that were quite helpful for easing the blow as it were.

DJ: Very interesting and I love the point you make about the fact that it's not sudden but you warm up to the transition rather than a cold...

VS: But nonetheless you make it clear to the incumbent that it is final. So, there's no politics and...

DJ: It's a ticking clock.

Yeah, it's a ticking clock so look, you are going to go, let's make it the smoothest for you, I think. And to be fair Vajpayee played that role.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If this notion of how we should manage transitions is of interest, you might like the playlist – Settling into a new context. You can go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and look at the Curated Playlists section and look at how different leaders dealt with this.

You might specifically like my conversation with Michael Watkins (MW), who has been studying Transition Acceleration for several years and has written the Bible of Transitions – First 90 days. One of the pieces he speaks about is when you get promoted to a new role and your peers now start reporting to you, how do you manage that awkward dynamic. In the Cafeteria, how do you think about seating yourself in the new table versus the old table? How do you walk the tightrope?

MW: *“So it’s a fun little thought experiment to think about doing that and that thing is bad the answer almost certainly is if not immediately, pretty quickly you should be seating with your peers. But you need to manage that in a way that’s reasonably deft unless you want to be sending a different signal right intentionally in the organization. But you still want to acknowledge people or you don’t want to be perceived as disconnected or dismissive about a group of people and the process. But this is hard it’s just hard because I think that I mean I was speaking again a one of the set of stake holder interviews that do one of the CEO I’m working with I was talking to one of this person’s previous direct report who now obviously is you know one step removed and It was almost like he was going through a grieving process right he loved working with this leader and he is not gone have as much access as he used to have and the new person in the role you know as his past was an interim may be not the same necessarily quality or character person so it’s nothing easy about it you know it’s just really challenging. But the same time that new CEO can’t afford to give in to the impulse to stay as connected with that like before people is they used to. I end up coming conversation about this all the time right its real struggle.”*

DJ: For more, please visit the conversation with Michael Watkins. You can go to [playtopotential.com](http://playtopotential.com) and find him in the Guests section. Thank you for reading.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Michael Watkins that is referenced: [Leading former peers](#).

## RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**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, Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

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### **Vinay Sitapati - Nuggets**

- 66.00 Vinay Sitapati - The Full Conversation
- 66.01 Vinay Sitapati - The uniqueness of the Advani-Vajpayee relationship
- 66.02 Vinay Sitapati - Managing transitions when power flips
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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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