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Context to the nugget

Ramesh shares his perspectives around why he has chosen to stay with McKinsey. He also speaks about an informal Board of advisors/mentors that he has architected to stay relevant and to stay interested and interesting in the world.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Lovely, super inspiring Ramesh. And maybe an associated question around transitions is one of the things I find interesting about McKinsey is it just gives you such an accelerated pathway into sort of developing one's skill set. One thing I have noticed with some of my friends and some of the other colleagues in industry is that once you get to a certain level of seniority, let's say once you have spent 10-15 years in the firm then, you know, it sort of significantly shrinks the feasible opportunity set that might open up in the outside world outside of McKinsey. As you think about people who transitioned from McKinsey to doing something else, do you... and if you reflect on the transitions that have gone well and maybe not so well, any themes any watch outs for people who are let's say partner-plus if I may in terms of how they should think about the transition to the next phase of their lives?

Ramesh Srinivasan (RS): Yeah, it's a good question, Deepak. I would say transition is something that you need to be thinking about all the time. So, I am always thinking about what do I want to do in the next four or five years? It could be inside McKinsey; it could be outside McKinsey. In fact, a few years ago we have set up what we call a Senior Partner Office that helps our senior partners, especially those who have been senior partners for 10+ years people like myself we need to think about what we want to do longer term and that spirit of renewal and learning is core to McKinsey. And my advice is to really think about both where is it that you know something about something so the deep expertise, I mentioned healthcare and leadership, while at the same time being fresh, which is a question you asked Deepak, how are you going to stay fresh and how are you going to learn about what's happening in the world and being relevant to the world. I also find it very critical to have networks outside, people who can be mentors, sponsors, advocates for you outside. I have my own group of advisors; we are a group of about 12 of us who meets the first Tuesday of every month and these are all people outside McKinsey who are deep friends but also mentors of mine. And unless there's a real there's a crisis or a really, really critical personal professional commitment, I don't miss that session with my, I call it, board of advisors or mentors that I have outside. And then the last point I would make is the power of weak networks. Some of my friends in operations management have told me opportunities often come from weak networks, not just some advocates or sponsors. If you have a sponsor, they probably have already thought of all the opportunities that might be there for you. So, maintaining that group of broader networks is so important because

often new breakthrough opportunities come from that. That would be the last advice or tip I would have for people, Deepak.

DJ: And coming back to your board of advisors, Ramesh, I respect the sensitivity and the confidentiality but any themes around the kinds of people you have in that board of advisors?

RS: I actually have a wide group of people. So, it has business leaders, it has a few people from government, a few lawyers, a few investors, people who are savvy about technology, media. So, it's a wide group that is at least a few people who are similar enough to me but a bunch of people who are different that then pushes my thinking and allows me to stay relevant and both be interested and interesting in the world, Deepak.

DJ: And if I may persist Ramesh, first Tuesday of every month you said, how do you set the agenda when you meet? Is it free-flowing or is it something that you pay attention to and plan ahead of time? How do you extract the value out of the board?

RS: So, we take turns in handling the agenda each time. So, one person roughly every month takes control of the agenda, but we also have the first part of the meeting, we meet for two-and-a-half hours so the first 45 minutes to an hour is just to check in where we go around and each of us talks about what's happened in the last month and a question or challenge that we are facing. And then the second part is really up to the person who is leading the agenda at that meeting. So, for example recently, I brought up the topic of racial equity and what should leaders do especially in the U.S. environment and how open should we be and what can we do to have impact. So, each of us brings a topic and then facilitates a discussion for an hour, hour-and-a-half on that specific topic. That's the second part, Deepak.

DJ: Very interesting, you sort of architected a Bower Forum for yourselves.

RS: You could say that. It's probably a distributed Bower Forum, but over time the intimacy and intensity we create is similar and it is a journey. It's a more "permanent Bower Forum", which is interesting because that's one of the innovations we are exploring in the core Bower Forum as well to make it a bit more of a journey versus a one-time event, which it is today. The relevant McKinsey person who comes with the clients does continue the relationship for a longer period but the forum itself; we do bring the alumni together from time to time. We brought our alumni together five years ago, and we are thinking of doing it again, so we do that, but it's not as frequent as my board of advisors' session, Deepak.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This nugget from Ramesh reminds me of the insight from Prof Herminia Ibarra (HI) of London Business School who speaks about the role of three kinds of networks in our ability to stay relevant and reinvent ourselves. She speaks about Personal Networks, Operational Networks and Strategic Networks.

HI: *"We do passes certain point in our career we do everything through relationship this is how we get things done, that's how we find out what's going on, that's how we get advice, perspective. And most people who are doing well have very good operational networks just help them get the day to day work done more smoothly maybe you know lets something done faster for them or they will get the information they need sooner but you know it is really kind of what's in the critical path of my routine day to day work that's the operational network. The personal network is the part that is you*

know the people that you have worked with who become friends and you have stayed in touch with and there is more emotional quality to it or may be some old mentors and there is often common interest there are longer term relations and most of this have those too and then the hard part, the tricky part is strategic network which has to do you know if the operation is about you today the personal often if about your past the strategic is about future and it's about how do you connect the dots between some of your interest and relationships that are may be external to your company, some of the internal relationships, help connect people, help bridge across different areas, help bring new ideas in, help export new ideas. It's really where you are adding unique value in the context of your work but in the most strategic aspects of it."

DJ: If I reflect on my journey over the last 5 years, I have had one set of professional relationships through the coaching work I have been doing. But in addition, I have also had an opportunity to build weak ties with some of the podcast guests. And this is across fields. And some of these relationships have led to very interesting possibilities, something that may not have been possible if I had kept the relationships to my professional circuit only. I hadn't quite anticipated it when I set out on this journey but that has been a fulfilling side benefit of this journey of curating this podcast and bringing it to you.

One of the questions I ask the leaders I coach during transitions is – “how are you being intentional about tapping into the power of weak links”? Unless we are deliberate about it, we are likely to operate in the echo chambers of our current ecosystem and that might limit the possibilities. You might like my conversation with Herminia Ibarra if this topic interests you.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Herminia Ibarra that is referenced: [Operational, Personal and Strategic networks](#).

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Reinventing Self: “How do I stay relevant” is a question that all of us have to grapple with as we go through our respective journeys. Careers aren't linear any more. Some of the leaders talk about how they managed to pivot during their journeys and significantly change trajectories. You can access the playlist [here](#).

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Ramesh Srinivasan - Nuggets

- 69.00 Ramesh Srinivasan - The Full Conversation
- 69.01 Ramesh Srinivasan - Leadership challenges during Covid-19
- 69.02 Ramesh Srinivasan - Discerning the "mandate"
- 69.03 Ramesh Srinivasan - Being versus Doing
- 69.04 Ramesh Srinivasan - Evolution of the Consulting model
- 69.05 Ramesh Srinivasan - Reinventing self within McKinsey
- 69.06 Ramesh Srinivasan - Personal Board of Advisors
- 69.07 Ramesh Srinivasan - Dealing with life quakes
- 69.08 Ramesh Srinivasan - Contributing to Education

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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