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Context to the nugget

Ramesh speaks about how he and his wife Charuta dealt with the trauma after losing two of their children to cancer. Their daughter Shruti was 9 when she passed away in 2009 and their son Aditya was almost 12 when he passed away in 2015. He speaks about how they dealt with the shocks and how they found meaning and purpose post that to move forward.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to a different theme Ramesh. Clearly, you spoke a lot about purpose and that being a key element of where you spend time and how or where you draw energy. On the personal front as well, I understand you have been through a lot and I understand that in a lot of ways that has influenced your outlook to life and as a professional. Could you share a little bit on that front in terms of how what's transpired in your personal life has impacted the way you think about choices?

Ramesh Srinivasan (RS): Yeah, and I don't talk about it that often but I have decided to do it to be helpful to all your listeners, Deepak. Unfortunately, my wife Charuta and I, we have lost two kids to cancer in the last 10 years. Shruti was nine-years-old when she passed away in 2009 and Aditya was almost 12 when he passed away in 2015 and both Shruti and Aditya were amazing kids. They were smart, extremely positive, and very wise for their age and that really has pushed both Charuta and me to think about who we are, why we exist, what is our own purpose. And I think, the more I think about it, I have come to a realization that my own purpose is to bring a source of positive energy, possibilities to the world. The smile I bring is the asset and I represent this positivity for everybody going through a tough time in this world of so much demoralization. I represent optimism and hope. And McKinsey has just given me a platform to be able to do this and do this at scale and have impact. And I feel very, very blessed Deepak that the universe, our family, our friends, you are a part of that have all helped me and Charuta sustain ourselves as we go through this journey, Deepak.

DJ: It's hard to imagine what you might have been through Ramesh and if I may please feel free to move on if we need to but one of the elements also is how do we handle it when we are going through it, right? At some stage you are able to look at it with a little bit of distance now, but especially given all the trauma we are seeing around given Covid and even otherwise, if you had to reflect a little bit on what you would tell people when you are going through these periods of extreme trauma if I may use the term? Any perspectives you would like to share Ramesh?

RS: Yeah, and we have touched on some of that even during this session, Deepak. We talked about the two phases of call it the survival/recovery phase versus the re-imagination and setting the purpose phase, right? So, thinking about where you are and having an honest assessment of your

state of being, state of mind is very important. And when you are going through that trauma and the intense trauma I have found it important to again really have practices that help you deal with the anxiety, being present, taking it one day at a time, you know, both Charuta and I would always say do we know and some of the doctors we worked with at Memorial Sloan-Kettering they were incredible advisors to us to say take life one day at a time. You know, what you need to do today, that's great. You need to plan for a week, that's useful. Whenever we would ask them about the prognosis of our kids they would say if we give you too optimistic a view you are going to then if something bad happens come back and blame us and lose credibility. If we give you too pessimistic a view, you will not live your life and like what's the point. So, really being, you know, taking life one day at a time is what we found helpful and that's my advice. And then the last point I would say is specifically if you are going through a medical crisis, we actually found it helpful. Again, it takes a village which I mentioned to you already, but we had people who helped us with our medical choices, my brother, a few others who are in the pharmaceutical industry, we had a few people who helped us with infrastructure. It takes a lot to prepare food, to get medicines, to transport people etc. And we had a group of people who helped us with our emotional support. Very often, I feel people underestimate the emotional support required when you are going through a tough time. So, really focus on that; we have been working with a therapist but also the friends and family that I touched on who then helped us through this emotional challenge. And in this day and age, you know another person I interviewed was Richard Barth, the CEO of the KIPP Network recently and he was talking about the challenge of mental health in this Covid environment. So, really putting disproportionate weight on that dealing with your own anxieties, loneliness is so important, Deepak.

DJ: So powerful Ramesh. To quote my journey, in a way I was with McKinsey in New Jersey when I came back to India to deal with my father's cancer back in Chennai. And to your point, one of the things I realized was, you know, while the hospital he went to I got medical opinion, the emotional element of coping with it somehow it was a piece which was, it was difficult to access the right ecosystem to make that, to take care of that dimension of care. So, so true.

RS: Yeah, I can see that and I can see the challenges involved Deepak explicitly.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: It is hard to even imagine what Ramesh and Charuta might have gone through. Of the various things Ramesh says, I was really moved to hear about he and Charuta have used these shocks to find meaning and purpose and have moved forward. I want to play that piece once again

(Rewind)

RS: *"that really has pushed both Charuta and me to think about who we are, why we exist, what is our own purpose. And I think, the more I think about it, I have come to a realization that my own purpose is to bring a source of positive energy, possibilities to the world. The smile I bring is the asset and I represent this positivity for everybody going through a tough time in this world of so much demoralization. I represent optimism and hope."*

DJ: I guess we can't control what life throws at us, but we do have agency to choose how we respond. It is just so inspiring to see how Ramesh and Charuta have crafted their Why after being through these two life shocks.

In one of my earlier podcast conversation, Meher Pudumjee (MP), Chairperson of the Thermax Group spoke about how she dealt with the twin shocks of losing her brother and her father in quick succession.

MP: "I feel that the gratitude that and the privileges and whatever that I have are far more and another big thing that I have learnt from death with both my brother and my father if you had to rewind the clock and say would you have lived your life differently without knowing that your dad will die at 60 and your brother and your brother at 25 would you do anything different and I would say predominantly so, not a lot, so the relationship that I had with both was so strong that I don't think I would have changed very much and therefore there was no guilt after death and I find that, that really helped in my healing process and I think the same for Anu. So, the biggest learning that I would say or the biggest take away that I would say is trying and really cherish the relationships that really matter to you, while people are alive so you really don't have that guilt once they are no longer there"

DJ: Do listen in to that conversation if you are looking for some perspectives around how to deal with these life changing events where it sometimes feels like somebody has pulled the rug under our feet.

In the next podcast conversation, I will be speaking with Bruce Feiler, an author who has studied several transitions and has recently published the book 'Life is in the Transitions'. He speaks about how we should deal with Life Quakes – events that get us to examine everything around us. One of the points he mentions is that we should resist the temptation to over-analyse when we are deep in this phase of trauma. As Ramesh says, he suggests that we cope with it a day at a time. Once enough time has passed, we sometimes are able to make meaning from these events. Bruce Feiler succinctly suggests that we examine our scars rather than our wounds to make sense and forge forward. Do look out for that conversation that I plan to publish sometime late February. Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Meher Pudumjee that is referenced: [Dealing with shocks](#).

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Ramesh Srinivasan - 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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