Context to the nugget conversation

Darleen speaks about the challenges in hiring effectively in the remote world. Atul Bhandari, Ritu Kochhar and Rohit also share their perspectives around how we need to tap into stories much more in these times and how remote work has opened up the aperture in terms of where people look for talent. They also share an interesting perspective around how companies are thinking about experience versus potential in these times.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to a different theme leadership assessment, which in a way it's sort of meat and potatoes at firms like Egon Zehnder and Spencer Stuart. I was talking to one of my friends in the search industry and he was saying that there's a certain kind of candidate who ends up presenting well in the online medium as compared to the real world and therefore it becomes even more important for us to ensure we don't get biased by how people present in an online medium. What would have you observed about assessment and judging leadership capabilities in the remote context?

Darleen DeRosa (Darleen): Yeah, and I think in many ways at least in the searches that we are doing, we are seeing a lot more of an interest in assessment maybe for a slightly different reason. But to your point, I mean, people whether your virtual or not people can interview well and we have known this right? And you know this from your time at Egon Zehnder. I mean, some people just interview better than others. So, a lot of our clients are really rethinking their assessment approach to make sure that it's multi-dimensional. And because of those leadership traits that I talked about earlier being much more important right now to many organizations, especially boards who are recruiting CEOs and senior execs wanting people who are authentic, who can engage people even despite the distance, there's a lot of those personal characteristics that boards are now really focused on integrity, you know, those things have always been important, but they are more important than ever. And so, a lot of boards and clients are using more multi-dimensional personality assessments and other types of assessments that go beyond just an interview where people might be particularly skilled in an interview or presentation and you might not be looking at the whole person. So, that's something we have clearly seen.

DJ: Atul Bhandari (Atul) of SpencerStuart India speaks about how interviewing in a remote world requires you to dig into stories and context much more than you would otherwise. He also speaks about the criticality of referencing.

Atul: *"So couple of things, one, it is very important to go deep into the stories that the candidates are telling us. And when I mean stories, it is about how have they created impact and in what*

environments they have created impact, which is what we used to do earlier as well by the way, nothing has changed on that. But just going a level deeper because you are not able to pick up some of those body language signals, has become very important. Secondly, I think the whole assessment has become lot more multi-dimensional, moving away just from an interaction, and what do I mean by that. So there is lot more focus on referencing today. In fact, not just us but even clients are keen to do references directly because that is where in the absence of meeting somebody physically, because typically in an interview process, you would meet somebody five-six times, you get multiple points of view, everyone would pick up a different interesting nugget that they picked up whether it was the eye contact, the body language, it is much harder to do on a screen. It is much harder to pick out some of those nuances when you are doing 10 to 12 Zoom meetings in a day. So that referencing has become extremely important."

DJ: Ritu Kochhar (Ritu) of SpencerStuart India speaks about the opening up of the aperture of recruitment given people could be productive from remote locations.

Ritu: *"In general if you ask me when it comes to taking decisions around hiring and, you know, I think most organizations which is good, not all but quite a few organizations have actually also started thinking about what the future of work will look like in their organization. And I think that has opened up the thinking a bit. I am not just talking about say just a CXO level talent but we are seeing organizations be a little bit more flexible. So you either have the work from home or you have the hybrid model or you have in some cases, so for example for tech companies, so there is this, you know, financial services company which wanted to set up a core digital led platform and this is Mumbai-based, traditionally they would have wanted everybody to relocate to Mumbai, right. Here, they are hiring people from Bangalore, Hyderabad, they have become so comfortable with that particular piece that they are happy to have an organization which works very differently than what their traditional financial services organization has actually looked like. So in some respect, it has actually opened up on how people think about some of these things in the new dynamic workplace and working models as we are talking about it."*

DJ: Rohit Kale (Rohit) speaks about how hiring from different areas is actually helping drive the diversity agenda.

Rohit: *"We all know, you know, finding, for example, hiring financial services talent into non-Mumbai locations is difficult. Similarly, finding digital talent in Mumbai is difficult and suddenly, you are saying, well, they do not need to come to Mumbai, they can continue to be based in Bangalore. It suddenly opens up the vista for the kind of talent that you could potentially bring into your company."*

DJ: He actually goes on to speak about how hiring in the remote world has led to people leaning more towards experience than potential.

Rohit: *"Where you are hiring for example completely new, you know, somebody from a completely different sector or a function into a role, it is that much harder. The familiarity that people bring into the role, kind of also has an impact on how successful that person is in a remote hiring and a remote integration scenario. And therefore, what we have seen, particularly the impact of the last is actually something that I am not very happy about is because people are defaulting to experience versus potential. They just feel that much more comfortable that the person knows what they are talking about, we are not betting too much on the potential of the person but we are hiring for what that person knows."*

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Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is possibly driven by the fact that the leader coming in as a shakier scaffolding to work with in the context of the transition. So focusing more on experience than potential is possibly a risk mitigation approach in these times.

The point Rohit makes around Experience versus Potential is an interesting one. I guess, our ability to take bigger risks with potential depends on the quality of the Integration processes in the organization. I work closely with a young Private Equity backed company in the Retail space. Given we were building out the organization from Ground Zero, what is helping us here is being deliberate about some of the elements of DNA of the kind of person we want in the organization and being deliberate about it at the time of hiring and reinforcing some of those themes as new leaders join. I guess, this is a journey and there are no magic answers. But like Sahiba says earlier, the remote world has possibly got us to be a little more deliberate and thoughtful about some of the intangibles such as Culture, Candidate DNA and so on.

End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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