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## Context to the nugget conversation

Harish speaks about 4 elements that need to come together in a good story. It needs to evoke an emotion, involve human spirit, use simple language and add value and leave the user with a thought or an insight. He also speaks about some of the stories of Brands (Indian and International) that have inspired him.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And going back to the art of storytelling, Harish, you spoke about stories, and we will get to the book in a minute, but I am curious about what you have learnt about the art of business storytelling, you know, what does it take to pick a good story, what does it take to tell it well, are there nuances that we should be aware of?

Harish Bhat (HB): Yeah. So, you know, my learnings about storytelling do not come from the corporate world, they come from great epics like the Ramayana and the Bible and the Mahabharat, many others. Also, non-religious epics like the Arabian Nights and they come from great works of literature, I love reading the books of Charles Dickens, I have grown up with them, I love reading Gabriel García Márquez and I have read so many times his One Hundred Years of Solitude, and I love reading many many works of fiction and history, and I have tried to bring those learnings into business storytelling and into brand storytelling. There are three or four principles that stand out for me, and these are principles, which I very much believe in. One is, a corporate story cannot be dry and factual. You need to have emotion in a story for people to relate to. If a story has no emotion to it, it is always flat. For instance, I would ask you, do you remember just reams of data and facts or do you remember a very good movie, which is told in a very emotional way. So the first truth that I have discovered about business brand storytelling is that it should have emotion to it and it should be able to connect with the reader through that emotion. The second truth I have discovered is, brand or business storytelling is not about corporates, it is about people, it is about people who build the brand, it is about people who build the business, people who have succeeded or failed, people who have overcome challenges, people who have seized opportunities. So it is about people and it is about the human spirit. Those are the kind of business and brand stories, which readers like to relate to. So the story is about the human spirit and not really about inanimate corporate. But the human spirit brings alive the idea of that corporate and makes it a living corporate. So that is the second lesson that I have learnt as I have gone along. The third lesson that I have learnt is, a business or a brand story has to be very simple. In the corporate world, a lot of strategy, a lot of presentations become very complex and become very, there is a lot of jargon to them. In fact, many professionals take pride in the jargon. That is not how a story works. A story has to be narrated in a very simple and lucid manner where people find it easy to imbibe, easy to listen to or easy to read. And that is very very important in the case of business or brand storytelling. Brands which have done that very

well, have won in the battle of storytelling. The fourth and final lesson I would say is, if a business or brand story that you are narrating also holds a lesson for the reader, then the story really resonates because at the end of the day, all of us want to learn, all of us want to add value to ourselves. And if a story that you are reading can inspire you to do more with your own lives, what better? And I believe there are enough business and brand stories, not just with the Tata Group, but with many corporates across the world and in India, which are very inspiring in their own right. Therefore, if I were to summarize these four, I would say, first and foremost, the story has to have emotion in it. Second, it needs to be a story about human spirit, more than just about a corporate. Of course, how the human spirit builds the corporate or the brand can still be articulated post that. The third point which I made about storytelling is that it has to be very simple and very lucid, shorn of all jargon, and that is sometimes challenging for corporate people to do. And the fourth is, if you really wanted to resonate with the reader, you also need to ask yourself what is the value add to the reader, am I just entertaining the reader or being informative to the reader or am I leaving behind a lesson, which will provoke the reader, inspire him or her to do something more with his or her life. So those are my learnings about business and brand storytelling that I have discovered over the years.

DJ: Fascinating. I was talking to a senior leader from the ad agency world, and he said, the good stories are a bit like a homeopathy pill. He said they are sort of entertaining and engaging on the outside but inside, there is a medicine and sometimes, you do not realize but there is a lesson, not in a preachy way, but when you sleep over it, there is something that helps you grow as a person.

HB: Of course. I think a business or brand storyteller should also not be preaching. Preachiness turns people off. Our job is to narrate a story, with all the facts of the case, but built to a storyline, which is entrancing and which holds people's interest. And let the reader digest that story and come to a conclusion herself on what is the lesson I can take forward from here into my life. You have to permit the reader that liberty. That is not the writer's prerogative. The writer's prerogative is to put forward the story. The reader's prerogative is what he or she wants to take out of it.

DJ: Hmm. And in terms of brand stories that stand out, I am sure there are several Tata stories, but outside of the Tata Group, who do you look for, who do you find inspiring in terms of the way they tell the story, which brands?

HB: Of course, the stories of the Tata Group are the ones that most appeal to me and that is quite natural. I have spent the last 34 years in this group, and I am greatly inspired by it. I think it is a timeless institution and there are thousands of inspiring stories over the arc of the last 153 years, which are resident within the Tata Group. But it is interesting you asked this because just yesterday, I was reading another fascinating brand and business story. I was reading this book called Harsh Realities, which has been authored by Harsh Mariwala, the Founder and Chairman of Marico, the company which has built powerful brands like Parachute and Saffola. This is a book which is co-authored by Harsh Mariwala and Dr. Ram Charan and they tell the brand story once again beautifully, the business story of Marico. Again, it is told as the story of the human spirit, it is told as the story of what people including Harsh have done to build the brand. But if I look at other Indian brands, I would say, Amul tells its story really well, the story of the co-operative of milk farmers, the story of how Amul has actually added value to them, the story of how Amul knows milk best. Through many many touchpoints, the Amul's story has kind of permeated into Indian consumers' lives. So I would hold that out as another very inspiring Indian brand, which has told its story very beautifully over the past several years.

DJ: Any international brand, just the top of the pile that appeal to you?

HB: I think a brand like Apple has told its story really well. Whether it is through the biography of Steve Jobs or whether it is about books written about Apple, the Apple's story sits deep in the minds of many people. Starbucks has told its story really well. I have read some of the early books written by Howard Schultz or books written about Starbucks or how Starbucks tells its story through each touchpoint, I have a great amount of admiration for how Starbucks is able to authentically craft and articulate its stories.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I must mention that Harish speaks about Harsh Mariwala. We will be publishing the conversation him on the podcast in a few weeks time. In my work experience, I grew up in a consulting context where the emphasis was on brevity, getting to the answer and saying things as crisply as possible. Storytelling is not a muscle that was developed explicitly.

So, when I met Indranil Chakraborty (IC), the Author of Stories at Work, an expert in the realm of business storytelling, I asked him about whether he thought there was a trade-off between storytelling and brevity. This is what he said:

*IC: "Not at all in fact one of the key things I teach and, in the book, also talk about it is brevity in storytelling. So, what happens is when you have a story to tell and why are we doing storytelling in business? We are trying to harness three big powers of story. One is stories are easy to understand, stories are easy to remember and stories are easy to retell. Some of the things that you do not get in a business situation how many off sites have you been to? Where the CEO or some senior leader has explained the next year strategy and then when people have comeback and their teams have said boss what was discussed in Goa he said strategy of next year what is the strategy? Or one power point will come, why is not repeatable? Because all those hours of so called business clear with lots of brevity has not landed. Now, when you use stories or story structures you get that power and you can do it in that same amount of time you would have otherwise taken because in many cases because of the layers of different English lines and sentences you are trying to explain very simple can be done with a story actually sometimes even shorter, so I don't see any fight between brevity, the desire for brevity and storytelling, in fact in the work of storytelling one of the critical things is brevity because brevity is best delivered when there is simplicity in communication and I love a Leonardo Vinci quote which said "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication" and so when you are able to get very simple with your message you are not going to be long with it but that simple tight story will deliver much more than what a long paragraph of a lot of huge English word will have manage to do."*

DJ: If you want to tune into more of this, you might find the conversation with Indranil Chakraborty of value. You might also like the Curated Playlist on Storytelling where several thinkers and practitioners speak about their take on the role of storytelling in business and in life.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Indranil Chakraborty that is referenced: [Demystifying Business storytelling.](#)

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## Harish Bhat - Nuggets

- 80.01 Harish Bhat - Key choices along the way
- 80.02 Harish Bhat - Perspectives on Navigating Career
- 80.03 Harish Bhat - Taking a pause
- 80.04 Harish Bhat - Art of storytelling
- 80.05 Harish Bhat - Profits with purpose
- 80.06 Harish Bhat - Identification with Labour AND Capital
- 80.07 Harish Bhat - Shaping culture through stories
- 80.08 Harish Bhat - Competing with a collaborative spirit
- 80.09 Harish Bhat - In Summary - Playing to Potential

## 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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