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Context to the nugget conversation

In one of the stories, Harish takes us back to 1930 when the competition was to see who could complete the fastest solo flight between India and England that year. JRD Tata (flying from India to England) and Aspi Engineer (flying from England to India) are two of the competitors and it turns out to be a close race to the finish line with these two. The story is about something that transpires between them when they meet in Egypt, something that illustrates the approach to competition in the Tata Group.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): One of the stories that caught my attention in the book, Harish, was the one of JRD Tata and Aspi Engineer, responding to the challenge set out by His Highness the Aga Khan for the first Indian to fly between England and India and there is a segment around the spark plug, which was fascinating for me. Without breaking suspense, I would love for you to share a little bit of context around this story and maybe, just to ask the following question as well, you know, the story is about competing yet collaborating, so if you could give us a sense of the story and what it means to the Tata Group in the way it operates its businesses.

Harish Bhat (HB): So let me not take away from the suspense of the story, I think listener should read the story yourself, that is the way it would best come to life, but this was a race announced by the Aga Khan way back in 1930 for the person who would complete the fastest solo flight between India and England in that year. JRD Tata was one of the competitors in the race and Aspi Engineer, a young Parsi boy was the other competitor in the race, and there was a third competitor called Manmohan Singh as well. It is an exciting story because you will see the way each of these people proceeded on their voyage, Aspi Engineer was actually flying from England to India, JRD Tata was flying from India to England, so JRD Tata took off from Karachi, Aspi Engineer took off from London and you could go either way in the race. The pivotal point is actually a point at which Aspi Engineer and JRD Tata meet somewhere in Egypt, an airfield in the midst of their respective voyages and JRD Tata asks Aspi Engineer what are you doing here, why is your flight parked here and why are you not moving forward and Aspi Engineer tells him that listen, my spark plugs have malfunctioned, so I am waiting for other spark plugs to come but that may take some time, in the middle of Egypt, you do not get spark plugs that easily. And then JRD Tata actually offers Aspi Engineer some of his own spark plugs so that Aspi Engineer does not need to wait and can take off quickly. Aspi Engineer wins that race by a couple of hours. JRD loses that specific race but both of them win friends for life. And I am not going to narrate the second half of that story here because it will be taking away, let us say, the thunder from the story if I do that. But as you read the latter half of that story, it is really heartwarming to see where their friendship led to because over the course of the next 40 or 50 years, both became great sons of India, JRD Tata became Chairman of the Tata Group and a legend

in the country, and Aspi Engineer became the Air Chief Marshal, the Head of the Indian Air Force, and himself became a legend amongst the Air Force and the Armed Forces and across the nation. So they were competing with each other, and who also collaborated with each other. And JRD Tata calls it one of the most fulfilling experiences of his own life as he reflects on that adventure.

DJ: And I love the way you say it he lost that specific race, right. And that is the perspective that is helpful to have.

HB: See, I believe in life, it is not important to win every specific race. It is important to win the more, it is important to win the races, which are truly meaningful and where you are adding value to the company you are part of, the people you are working with in a very meaningful and significant way. And winning a race in a graceful gentlemanly way, you can be competitive, yet gentlemanly, winning a race, which is competitive, yet you do it in a very graceful gentlemanly way, I believe are some of the best races that you can win.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Thank you for listening. For more, please visit playtopotential.com

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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