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## Context to the nugget conversation

Sukhinder speaks about her decade long journey with David Lesser and speaks about the different ways in which he added value to her. She speaks about the benefit of cumulative context that David had that helped him work with Sukhinder to reconcile various pieces over time and across her distinct identities.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And you talk about your journey with David Lesser, your coach in the book and you talk about, I think, at some point, you say that you worked with him for a decade or more in your journey with him. As a practicing coach, I am curious about what a journey looked like for you without getting into the confidential...

Sukhinder Singh Cassidy (SC): Yeah, the nitty-gritty, yeah.

DJ: What has been of disproportionate value to you? Sometimes you do a lot of things but one or two things stand out, so I would love your reflections on that.

SC: Sure. So first of all, I found David through YPO because as I ascended at Google and became a leader, I also found that I wanted to try the people I could talk to, that was the promise of YPO, you find similarly minded peers and you are in a discreet and confidential forum. First of all, I did my first learning that led me here is trying to make your spouse your work priest, like I am not a fan, maybe it is because I put so much on my own husband. And by the way, he is, you know, as you can tell, I would not have this career without having a very supportive spouse but supportive does not mean that they are meant to, like, we are meant to use our marriages to drain all the energy out of them by putting them through all our work anxieties. Like you just take energy from one sphere and you drain it. And so whenever I am obsessed with work, I have learned it, if I want to put that into my marriage you know, not a great two-way giving relationship. So what led me into YPO was like, look, how I not put this all upon myself and find a peer group to talk to. And inside of that, I learned that, while I loved YPO, it was taking a lot of time but I really liked the coach who was coaching our forum, David Lesser and I was like, can I just work with you directly, this seems a lot more efficient. And luckily, he said yes. So that is how I found him. And then to your point about what has been a disproportionate value, keep in mind, I went through multiple big transitions, the decision to leave Google, I told you I had a failed choice that did not work out with Polyvore, my first startup. The startup I went to after Google where I took a big risk and then obviously I evolved again when I became the CEO of StubHub. So the disproportionate value is the continuity. If you give up on having a coach, let us say in Year 2, they have not seen your cycles to reflect back to you. Number two, he has been with me through multiple management teams, is somebody I can bring in, you both have

my history but can help new people get to know me and navigate me, help me navigate them, so I have actually used him even as somebody to get my 360 feedback from because my management teams know that I trust him. They know that they, you know, so they know that maybe if they want to give me feedback and they are too afraid to give it to me face-to-face, they know that I am providing them a conduit for somebody I trust who can hold their feedback and give it to me. So that history has a lot of value. It helps with pattern recognition. So I would say one of the biggest values is then, like, it is one of my longer standing relationships beside my marriage, and is somebody who can reflect back to me what I said five years ago what can stitch together my own feelings of myself with when I used him to get peer feedback or 360 feedback, other people's view of me and helped give me a holistic perspective. And I know and I think at the end of the day, this is the value of coaches. We know that, yes, we may be paying them but their job is to help us be our best selves with no skin in the game other than our success. No politics, it is just like a very peer relationship. And so I appreciate that, like I appreciate having somebody in my corner with whom I can be completely authentic, who has no other vested interest other than my success, and who I also trust to give me feedback, like I trust they have my best intention. So I think it is a conduit for us as leaders. I think that a great coach is a conduit for us to learn about ourselves, probe ourselves, challenge ourselves and that is why I like the history and tenure in that relationship that has had given me disproportionate value.

**DJ: Got it and if I may stay with this Sukhinder, any rituals or any practices that you do with your coach, which has really stood out for you, which has been of significant value?**

SC: Well, it is not like we, you know, sometimes you just listen to let me rant. I do not think we have particularly, like I do not think we always go to this ritual but there are few. David is actually very good at making you, I know it sounds hokey, but it is very true, making you talk to your inner self. Because as I said, David will like take all the parts of you and I think some of our rituals are always about like separating out the different identities I have and I really like that with David. So David knows when I am bringing out my inner risk manager when I was making choices literally, let us have a conversation with your inner risk manager. I was like, what are you talking about. He is like, no no, you are going to sit in this seat and talk to the part of yourself that is scared, that is the part of yourself that is ambitious and literally have a conversation with these two different identities, that is one example. Another is he knows that I was raised in a fairly religious family. So I was raised by two Sikh parents and I consider myself pretty religious and so I literally, like, there is a part of me that believes that work is soulful and purposeful and I believe that the way I am going to show up in the world and have an impact maybe through business and I fundamentally think those things are intertwined. They may not be for others but for me, that is what I saw my parents do, their purpose and their vocation were the same thing. So I can literally have a conversation with David is like, well, what would your father say, what would your, you know, like if you think about the spiritual side of you, what would it say, so I appreciate that he is somebody who can disaggregate my separate identities and let them talk to each other as I tried to make more choices. So that has been something pretty unique in our relationship and I appreciate it about him. There are other coaches who may not be the same way. But for me, trying to bring all of myself to everything I do and somebody who recognizes those different competing parts of myself has been a gift.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: What Sukhinder says here is so so powerful. Every now and then, I have an opportunity to work with somebody who was my colleague at School about 20 years back. When I am working with them as a Coach or as a Sounding Board, having that cumulative context and the time trend view of their

journey is of tremendous value. You are able to show the mirror and get them to reconcile some of these pieces over time.

Leaders often go through very different contexts. One of the leaders I have been engaging with over the last 5+ years is a French national who was leading an Industrials company in India when I met him around early 2016. He reached out to me to help me think through some of the choices in front of him as his Italian Headquartered company was taken over by a German MNC. We spent a bunch of time on various pathways and we felt that he would be great for turnarounds. He got an opportunity to parachute himself into an Asian company owned by a European MNC which was in the middle of a turnaround. So, he called me in 2018 to work with him and his leadership team which had a combination of locals and Europeans. It was a combination of helping him transition effectively and helping elevate the capabilities of his leadership team. After delivering record performance and steering the company to a better place, earlier this year, this transitioned back to Europe where he has taken charge in his family business where there are multiple complex layers given family business dynamics. I am working with him as a sounding board through this context and having seen him at work in the past and knowing what he is like and what is hard wired, it gives me an opportunity to help him tweak his style in the current context.

Very often, organizations and leaders productise this journey and talk about 6 months or 9 months as a period of intervention. I find it most fulfilling and most impactful when I engage with a leader for a few years where you can bring in the several years of nuanced context to bear in making a tweak here or a tweak there which sometimes can make all the difference.

## End of nugget transcription

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- 82.04 Sukhinder Singh Cassidy - Decade long coaching journey
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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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