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Context to the nugget conversation

Harsh speaks about how he thinks about assembling a good quality Board and extracting value from them.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I think it's interesting and staying with this theme, you know, Rajeev Bakshi in the book it mentions that the greatest accomplishment and the strongest suit of Harsh is possibly leveraging the board members individually and collectively to stimulate discussions. It's not just about having six experts around the room but how do you get the collective might? So, talk to us a little bit about that.

Harsh Mariwala (HM): So, in terms of board constitution I am very clear that each person brings a certain set of competencies at the board level. If I look at my board, we have one digital expert, we have an HR expert, we have one finance expert, we have one retail expert and we have one FMCG expert. And individually, I may need to get their viewpoint in the board meeting or outside the board meeting, not only me, but the Managing Director or the CXOs they can interact with board members directly depending on the kind of issues they are facing. For example, the HR Head would interact with the HR person on the board but collectively also it is very important that we have the right chemistry in the board and the right set of issues to be discussed in terms of agenda creation. And most importantly, the role of Chairman, you need to give a very high degree of assurance to the board members that on statutory issues, on governance issues we are at a very high degree of compliance and they need not worry about it and most of the issues are strategic issues, talent judgment issues and that's where you can take maximum out of a board. So, if there is a strategy issue which for in which in the board meeting there is a functional expert, normally, as a Chairman, I would ensure that I will go ask each person what do they think about it? And I will go to the functional expert the last. I don't want domination in the board meeting to be by that functional expert because if that functional expert says something first others will just stop talking about it. So, you have to follow a process, wherein you get the maximum out of each member and of course the functional expert will come in, but that person should come in the last because if that person comes in first then others will not just open up because that guy's knowledge on that particular subject is much, much better.

DJ: It's very interesting you say this. On this podcast, I had the opportunity to speak to Vishwanathan Anand, the chess legend, and of the questions I asked him was when you put together a team to prepare for a tournament, by definition you are world No.1, when he was world number one, everyone else is sort of second. How do you really, you know, get their contribution? And he said

something very similar, he said you speak last because if you speak then the others don't say anything beyond that. So, it's interesting you mentioned that.

HM: But that is the role of the Chairman. The Chairman has to have very good chemistry so at one level we have, so you have to take steps to improve chemistry including selecting the right board members and going for retreats, having some non-business events, morning events and things like that just to build that chemistry.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point by Harsh around going to Functional Expert last is a simple but a profound one. As I mention in my conversation with Harsh, here is the clip from Vishy Anand (VA) where he speaks about leveraging the power of the team.

VA: *"I have learnt that the first rule is think is actually well known, that you don't get into your first opinion first don't off over because once you off on and opinion you often spend a lot of energy defending your opinion rather than even when you think it's wrong you don't want to lose phase and so that when my team would show me stuff my first skill was to keep my mouth shut, because if what they say is turned out to be better, then this better not to have opposed in the beginning, in the sense I am more open to contradictory opinions of people who disagree with me violently because I realize well that's kind of the path to better understanding, over long periods of time you learned how the moody people are, you see their real side and you need a certain kind of tolerance with that you need a sense of how good or bad, pleasant or annoying you can be, what people may like in you in day 1 may not be what they in you at day 7 and you have to be aware of that I think you perceive these things much better, so over a long camp now a days I am able to tell if I am greeting on my trainer, he is greeting on me it's not perfect still but you know you get better at those things and in the end if you create the most, conquerable atmosphere your will produce the best ideas."*

DJ: I guess leaders need to work extra hard to produce the right atmosphere to produce the best ideas as a group develop and are given due attention.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Vishy Anand that is referenced: [Performing at the top and being grounded.](#)

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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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