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Context to the nugget conversation

Rajiv speaks about how leaders can be thoughtful about what they delegate thereby creating bandwidth and mind-space for themselves to engage on the most impactful set of activities.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Changing tracks, Rajiv, you also talk about delegation, and I liked one of the things you say where you say that, I quote, *'leaders who are exceptional at delegation do not just delegate what they cannot do, they do only those things that no one else can,'* can you bring this to life for us with an anecdote or two?

Rajiv Vij (RV): Yeah, the basic premise here, Deepak, is that typically, for leaders or any executive, when work flows to them, like, whether it is a new idea, new strategy, new innovation, product, technology, whatever, the tendency is that okay, let me grapple with it, let me see how we can do it and then I will divvy it up to some of my team members, etc., etc. And invariably, the tendency is to jump into the work and, when you sooner or later realize that you cannot do everything, then you start delegating it to others. So, if it is like what that is what I say that you delegate what you cannot do, not from a capability point of view, but literally from a bandwidth point of view because you can, hopefully most leaders can do what their team members are doing quite well as well except for some very specialist skill. But the smart leaders that I have seen, what they do, is that anything that they are starting or coming to them or external, internal, their instinct is, who in my team can do this, who is best suited for this idea, that there is innovation, technology, external networking, talking to the government, whatever the thing maybe, their instinct is to engage someone else. And only if there is something that nobody in their team can do because it is something either so crucial or, you know, only their presence is required etc., etc., will they get involved with. And that is the whole sort of the paradigm that good leaders delegate what they cannot do which is in terms of time, but the great leaders do only that which nobody else in their team can do. So, as a result, what it does is it does two things, one is, it is hugely empowering for team members, and equally, it actually creates the space, the time and bandwidth for the leaders to engage with the most important things because the other paradigm is that managers do things right. As we grow in our careers, we get so obsessed with this being Mr./Ms. Reliable and that creates this all perfectionism, etc., etc. which is a great trait when you are junior or middle management. But when you get to leadership position, that actually is dilutive and so, managers do things right but leaders do the right things as in they focus on the most important. So, when they delegate so aggressively, so ruthlessly, that is when they create the time for engaging with the most important. So that is what leads to huge effectiveness. So, their thing is again just to bring some more detail into it. Let us say, it is like every time people get called for a meeting and you try and attend that meeting and we know in corporate life, maybe a third of meetings, we are thinking, hey, why am I here, like, did we really

need this meeting. But this leader is going to start by saying, do we need this meeting. If the answer is, yes, do I need to attend this meeting, maybe I will send somebody else from my team, why do I have to, what is so crucial, just because protocol, no, that is not good enough, will I add value or can my deputy add equal values, if he or she can do it, then let them attend. If the answer to that is now, yes, you still need to attend because it is really important for you, then the question is, do I need to attend it now, as and when the meeting is being called or if I am busy, can I push it away. So, it is in the light of both empowerment and aggressively protecting their time, that great leaders follow this kind of a principal.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of an episode when I had just joined Egon Zehnder, the Search firm I worked with for 6 years. I was experiencing a little bit of a crisis situation in one of the searches and I went to the Office Leader and my mentor – Govind Iyer to get him to intervene. As I rambled on giving him the context, he stopped me dead in my tracks and asked me – “Is the client relationship at risk”? I remember being taken aback by the directness of the question. I paused for 10 seconds and said NO. He looked at me in the eye and said, then you go deal with it. You don’t need me. That was a really powerful lesson for me in terms of understanding how he prioritized his time and used it only for the most impactful set of activities. That also gave me the ability to problem solve and build muscle around some of the tactical issues that arise during a search.

When I work with leaders, I ask them – what is it that you and only you can do in the organization? Be ruthless about ensuring that you make time and Mindspace for those activities and aggressively delegate the rest.

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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