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Context to the nugget conversation

Ravi speaks about how we could think about measuring our life. He speaks about how he has gone about discovering what makes him distinctive and chosen the various initiatives that he has participated in.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Just moving forward, Ravi, one of the questions I think about back to your, back to our conversation in the beginning around choices. Is this... even if we look at the example of someone like a Mekin and you starting GAME and someone like a Padmashree, if I were to relate it to the way I see it, sometimes I find there is an inside-out approach to situations where you say these are the things I am passionate about, these are the things that give me energy and, you know, let me take a baby step see where it goes, take another step see where it goes and just sort of keep it anchored around where I find my meaning, purpose and energy. There is the other approach where you start with a big problem, right? Millions of jobs, we need to solve this at scale, we need to have a systemic response, how do we sort of attack this and then you come up with an approach and you engage. How have you thought about, is it a binary question? I find there are certain kinds of people, you know, I got this feedback once that one of my earlier colleagues told me I have an artisanal mindset and somehow that stayed with me. And even in the way I think about the podcast or the work I do, it is a very, in a way closer to the Padmashree approach than a Mekin approach if I may paint those two paradigms. But how do you think about that and what's your guidance to people when they are at the crossroads?

Ravi Venkatesan EP2 (RV): I don't know. I always go back to that Ikigai diagram of the intersecting circles of what you are good at, what you enjoy doing, and what the world needs and values. And somehow, you have to try and find your, swim your way to the intersection of this. And obviously, it is not a static thing, it is a moving thing. So, there are so many opportunities in the world, there are so many challenges in the world, I am not drawn to many of them. You pay attention to what you are drawn towards and usually it will be things that you enjoy doing and there is some element of what you enjoy and what you are good at in there. So, for instance, my next big mission is in climate change and it is in particular around energy transition to renewable energy and energy access, and this is a global scale project. So, we all know that there is this problem out there, why this problem? Well, I look at myself. I intellectually enjoy very, very complex, wicked problems, because it is like a puzzle. Some people like doing Wordle; I like these types of problems, that's me, okay? So, I am drawn to that. It requires, many, many stakeholders to come together and collaborate. Well, that's another thing I both enjoy, and I am fairly good at and know how to connect and engage and build trust and get people to want to come together behind something. I have a lot of experience building these types of alliances now first with GAME then globally with UNICEF. So, I am a little further down

that journey in terms of having lived and walked it and knowing what mistakes to avoid than many others. So, that's a useful skill. So, it is that intersection that you need to define. Yeah, so, and it is not something that you can sit and think your way towards. You can't sit in a room or chat with a friend and figure it out, you have to experiment your way, feel... one of the phrases I use most often in all my talks and my writing is Deng Xiaoping's phrase, which is you cross the river by feeling your way across the stones. I think it is the most beautiful metaphor moving in the face of uncertainty. So, you make experiments and the feedback of those experiments you gradually gravitate to this intersection of sweet spot.

DJ: Hmm. I guess just maybe staying with this for a couple of minutes, even back to your experience when you are at Microsoft, when you are doing one thing, often the metrics of progress are easy to measure, but when you doing many things, often it is hard to get a sense of am I doing enough, am I moving the needle and if I see it in my context, right, I think the how do I transition, how do I reinvent is a mass problem, but I am trying to sort of trying to have a cottage industry kind of an approach to solving an industrial problem if you know what I mean. So, sometimes I wonder if I am doing enough. So, I wonder how you think about success and metrics as you move forward?

RV: Clearly, I think that is one of the central questions of life. How will you measure your life and it is not a new question, it is there?

DJ: Yes.

RV: The Greek philosophers talked about it etc. and I have... it is also something that evolves if you are intentional. And so, my definition of what success is at 30 is very different from what it is at 60. And I have come, there was a couple questions actually intertwined cleverly in your thing but... so, there is a broader question of how do you figure out how you are going to define success for yourself? And then I thought I heard a second question which was embedded which says, look, when you are doing these kinds of complex things, how do you know if you are even making a difference? In Microsoft, market share, growth, profitability are easy metrics. I think these are two different questions. So, on the second one, look, we are tackling incredibly complex systems change issues out there. And so, you just show up every day and chip away chip away and mostly nothing is happening. And then sometimes suddenly something big will improve and that's rather hard to predict and so forth. So, I drew... and you can get very depressed because on a day-to-day month-to-month basis, you don't see much happening. That's why I draw courage from Mother Teresa, one of the things she said was in life there are no great things, there are just small things done with great love. And sometimes, something small becomes something big but there is no way of counting on it or predicting it. And so, I say as Buddha says, the most important thing is to show up and sit and something might happen. But if you don't sit nothing is going to happen, that's guaranteed. So, that's how I choose to view it and so you also need to have a portfolio of things some of which give you feedback on a daily basis. So, going out to a street and being kind to people gives you that that big kick that you need, that gratification whereas this long-term stuff may or may not. Also, I have come to the conclusion that none of what I do may actually matter to the world, but it matters profoundly to how I feel about myself and therefore it is worth persisting. And that has taken some years. So, I am not under any illusion that we will create a mass entrepreneurship movement. Obviously, I don't tell funders that, but yeah, it is a very, very tough problem and we may make a dent here and a scratch there, but it is not at all certain that we will succeed in our mission. But just when I look back at the end of my life, I think I am going to feel very good about at least having not wasted my life just feathering my nest but tackling something important. So, that's a long-winded answer to that second question on how do you measure success. Then again, I am profoundly, profoundly influenced by this one sentence from a professor at Stanford, former professor at Stanford called James Marsh and I use that as I put it everywhere, I have it in front of me right now.

He says, look at the end we are a very minor blip in a cosmic story and he says all our aspirations for importance and significance are just illusions, all our hopes are minor except to us, but some things do matter, mostly be... and what might make a difference to us is if in our tiny roles in our brief time we inhabit life gently and add more beauty than ugliness. So, for me this is the most beautiful statement of how you might want to measure your life. And therefore, all you have to do is get specific about what do I need to do to walk more gently, what does that mean and given the unique assets that I have that we talked about earlier, different forms of capital assets, how can I contribute to making the world a little more beautiful? And so, I found my answer at this point to those two questions and I think this may be a reasonable question for everyone that is searching, which is your way of doing it is helping people find their potential and making their lives and the world consequently more beautiful in that process and that's something you are uniquely capable of doing. So, yeah, that's how I have reasoned my view. I am not saying this is the answer of what has worked for me.

DJ: **And the one phrase just to understand Ravi when you say walk more gently, what does that term mean to you?**

RV: Well, one is be kind, walk more gently on people's feelings and emotions, jaywalk more gently on the planet making incredibly irresponsible thuds, what does that mean in terms of our personal consumption, personal habits, and can you be little lighter in terms of that. Yeah, those would be two examples of walking more gently.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Building on the point that Ravi makes around walking more gently, one of my earlier Guests Venkat Krishnan (VK) (Founder of GiveIndia) speaks with a tremendous sense of vulnerability about the notion of an Emotional Foot print that speaks to a similar theme.

VK: "Kind of like the carbon footprint, right? So, I think, you leave in your interactions with people you leave them feeling better or feeling worse. So, when you leave people feeling better, you have an emotional positive what Steven Covey calls emotional bank account balance, and this idea first occurred to me when I read 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. I am a ridiculously low EQ guy. Everything even emotions I actually calculate, think about etc. and I know that I am going to have hurt far more people in my life than I would have brought joy to, emotionally speaking, I mean, and I am not... I am discounting of course that I might have helped somebody get food and therefore they are able to have a happy family and there is an emotional payoff of all of that and something like that, I am discounting that, I am just looking at more from a personal ecosystem point of view a bunch of friends, relatives, family, other people etc. And if I look at their emotional expectations from me, I am going to leave most people short-changed on that in my life and it hurts, that that's going to happen, but I do keep going back to it periodically, it's difficult to change yourself as you get older, but I tried and I have made some changes but I am wired the way I am and my one regret when I finally die is going to be that I have left a negative and emotional footprint on the earth."

DJ: I guess, there is an opportunity for each one of us to focus not just on the what we do but How we come across when we do what we do?

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from Venkat Krishnan that is referenced: [The Full Conversation](#).

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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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