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## Context to the nugget

Want to make a difference in society? A lot of us want to positively impact the world around us. But often times, this intention fades into the background or does not come to fruition. Enter Social Venture Partners a platform for people like you who want to be agents of change. Hear Ravi talk about their 'million jobs mission' and the unique challenges faced by leaders in the social sector.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** Talk to us a little bit about this whole 'million jobs' mission and what that's about?

Ravi Venkatesan (RV): First, let me talk about Social Venture Partners itself. This is a 17 18 year old organization, set up originally in Seattle, but we started it in India in 2013. The whole idea was how you get successful people, entrepreneurs, professionals involved with the communities in which they live, so that they become agents for change and transformational leaders in society. Much of the dysfunctional aspects of India, I believe, are because people like all those who might be listening to your podcast live incredibly private lives and disengage more and more from society. So, if we want to create functioning societies, we need good people to be more engaged. That's why we thought SVP might be an interesting model, and today, there are 200 partners and in five cities. We obviously decided that we needed to sink our teeth into something that is common purpose. We said, given what's going on in India today, the issue of jobs, or more precisely, livelihoods, is a good one for us to try and make some dent in. So, we set ourselves without knowing exactly how we're going to achieve it this audacious target of 'can we improve the incomes of one million people in a significant way by 2020'. We actually put that stake in the ground in 2015 and here, it is already 2017. So, that's what we're all about. We've been doing lots of experiments on how exactly we have this kind of impact. Now, we're converging more and more on the idea that solving such an intractable or wicked problem at such scale requires all stakeholders to come together in a collaborative fashion around a common purpose, common mission an idea called collective action. We are trying to see if SVP could be the platform for this kind of a mission.

**DJ:** How's the leadership in the social world different from what you've experienced in the for profit world?

RV: As you said, there's a lot of people out there with good intentions. As you begin to feel successful as you get older, there is that desire that need, to actually contribute to something bigger than yourself. I think it's a really wonderful phenomenon that's growing stronger around the world, and certainly in India. The challenge is, it's not always evident how to make a difference and what your leverage points are. I think the social sector is I am no expert on it but based on five years of

thinking about these issues fundamentally different in some ways. First of all, in a company, the success metrics are quite clear and well defined: revenue, bottom line. Whereas in a social problem, it's far more complex defining what success looks like, let alone measuring it and attributing success. Therefore, it becomes sometimes harder to mobilize people and certainly very, very hard to hold people accountable. The second issue is one of resources. There is much less abundance, so you have to be very frugal and very creative in how you are going to leverage resources. You can't pay people as much; therefore, you've got to figure out what is the value proposition that's going to attract bright, passionate people to work on these kinds of problems. Very frankly, sometimes, you also get people who are not necessarily the most accomplished and yet there's a lot of passion. How do you inspire them, motivate them? They are doers, so the ways in which you lead and manage are quite different.

What else is different? I think, there's almost nothing you can accomplish on your own. You have to work with a whole set of players, civil society, companies and government and so you need to be a really high EQ person if you are going to form trust based relationships with an incredibly diverse set of people. Inherently, we live in an environment of low trust and declining trust, so this is an interesting challenge. The worst thing you can do is come in there as a know it all 'I've seen how it works in the corporate sector, I'm here to help' and then you hear the sound of crashing china, the bull in the china shop phenomenon. Very often, people from the corporate sector, with all good intentions, end up making that mistake.

**DJ: In a country like India, where there's no shortage of problems to solve, how did you think about figuring out which problems to go after?**

RV: The beauty of India is, there's lots of things you can do. So, in a sense, it really doesn't matter which cause you pick. You have to pick something that you care about, you're passionate about. When we started thinking about SVP, the set of people who were in the room gravitated towards jobs and livelihoods. So, it wasn't like there was some big scanning that we did and said which sectors are the most important or neglected. It was where our collective passion was and I would say that's probably the most important thing. The other important thing is once you decide where you're going to play, the theatre, you do have to bring systems thinking to it, because otherwise what you're doing, very likely, is just putting little Band Aids around issues. Maybe that's also necessary and helpful, but certainly it's not going to prevent problems from persisting. So, if you really want to make a difference, you need to be able to have a worm's eye view and the bird's eye view and go back and forth. You need that ability to see the whole system and the interrelationships and the linkages and figure out where the leverage points are.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I realize that in my interactions with friends, clients and colleagues, several of them have the right intent about giving back. But often don't know how. Personally, for me, SVP has been a great platform to contribute to the Social cause while working with a set of like minded people. But more selfishly speaking, I feel I have benefited a lot more in terms of my improved understanding of some of the issues around me and have changed as a person.

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## End of nugget transcription

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### About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock 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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